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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF *LES MILIEUX DE MÉMOIRE SOMBRE*:
AN INTERPRETIVIST APPROACH

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Identity Construction of *Les Milieux de Mémoire Sombre*: An Interpretivist Approach

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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ALEXANDRU OCTAVIAN DIMACHE

Abstract

Death and suffering have become integral parts of the contemporary popular culture. Peoples' ever-increasing interest in visiting sites associated with death and suffering is matched by the increasing popularity of this phenomenon in the tourism academia. Notwithstanding this popularity, researchers have not managed to reach an agreement on whether dark tourism is demand or supply-driven. The term 'dark tourism' itself has come under intense scrutiny mostly because of its pejorative undertones. Based on this, the current study hears scholars' calls for innovative interdisciplinary qualitative mixed-method experiential research which places analytical and introspective thought at its core by giving voice to previously overlooked stakeholders and placing the interpretation in the relevant socio-cultural context. In so doing, a dyadic hermeneutic-phenomenological and semiotic bricolage approach is employed to investigate the relationship between memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction at the Sighet Memorial Museum in Romania. To support the interpretive process, a framework of transgenerational collective memory called Romanianness is developed. The findings challenge the typical approaches focused on the dualities between supply-demand, push-pull, individual-collective, and material-immaterial. They also challenge Pierre Nora's long-lasting *Les Lieux de Mémoire* thesis by exposing experience with sites associated with death and suffering as imbued with ever-so-present memory. Through this process, two replicable experiential models are constructed, and the concept of *les milieux de mémoire sombre* (translated as *places of somber memories*) is added to the broader tourism theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable. [...]

Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.

And all is always now.

(T.S. Eliot - The Four Quartets)

These lines by one of the twentieth century greatest poets, T.S. Eliot, suggest that the socio-cultural construction of 'time' exists in a continuous flux where the constant interplay between past and future is (co)constructed and (re)negotiated in the present. Such an understanding mirrors the nature of another fundamental concept: 'place'. Just like 'time', 'place' gains existence when infused with meaning by humans, while, in turn, these meanings - sometimes conflicting - are (co)constructed and (re)negotiated according to specific present-day interests. What holds past, present, and future times and places intertwined are memories and narratives, in their individual and collective forms.

Although memories and narratives of positive events support the development of strong identitarian bonds between individuals and places, even stronger bonds are based on memories and narratives of negative events, such as those of the Holocaust, World Wars, or totalitarian regimes (Light, 2017). This is because places associated with death and suffering have the potential to trigger profoundly emotional and meaningful experiences which distinguish dark tourism from other forms of tourism (Nawijn, Isaac, van Liempt, & Gridnevskiy, 2016). Due to a tumultuous human history, places linked to memories of suffering abound worldwide, and many of them have contemporaneously been developed into sites of tourism activity, such as museums, memorials, or other heritage sites. One such site is the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Romania, one of the many political prisons and labor camps which dotted the country during its Communist regime (1947-1989).

People travel to sites of death and violence. This fact is as clear as the fact that suffering is nowadays an integral part of the contemporary popular culture (Nell, 2006; Light, 2017). The media has become a mechanism linking memories and sites of suffering to a traveling public. The popularity of such sites is mentioned by Smith (1998, p. 205) who suggests that sites or destinations associated with war probably constitute ‘the largest single category of tourist attractions in the world’. This phenomenon of people traveling to sites of death and suffering has been scholarly labeled *dark tourism* or *thanatourism* (Foley & Lennon, 1996; Seaton, 1996; Lennon & Foley, 2000). Taking into consideration the social, cultural, political implications surrounding dark tourism sites, and also their high emotional loading, understanding visitors’ experience with such sites becomes vital for a wide variety of stakeholders.

1.1 Problem Statement

On average, social scientists tend to agree that the field of tourist experience would benefit from further multidisciplinary research (Larsen, 2007). It is argued that too much focus has been placed on concepts such as ‘destinations’, ‘impacts’, or ‘motivations’, and too little on the psychological processes related to individual tourist experiences (Larsen, 2007; Wright, 2010). This is ever so true when discussing the dark tourism literature. The approaches usually employed when researching the phenomenon of traveling to sites of death and violence are supply or demand-driven, descriptively revolving around the pull and push factors of tourism. Although Light (2017) reveals a considerable increase in dark tourism research endeavors focused on experience between the first (1996-2005) and second (2006-2016) reviewed period, many of these studies still analyze the visitor experience from a demand perspective usually linked to motivations. In fact, very few dark tourism studies – such as Biran, Poria, & Oren (2011) – have explicitly employed an experiential perspective. Moreover, these studies tend to depict experience as rather static and fail to explore the depth and diversity of the phenomenon. In turn, this has led to a tendency among dark tourism scholars ‘to be critical of visitors to dark places, assuming them to be ill-informed, likely to see such places as little more than entertainment, or likely to behave inappropriately or disrespectfully’ (Light, 2017, p. 282). To amend this, Light (2017, p. 295) builds on the work of Packer & Ballantyne (2016) to propose that ‘more attention is needed to the introspective, sensory, transformative and spiritual dimensions of the experience’. An even richer understanding can be obtained by addressing many researchers’ reluctance to seek to understand the visiting experience at places of death and suffering by linking it to the broader cultural, social, political, and

historical context in which it takes place (Light, 2017). In the same line, Light (2017) emphasizes the importance of dark tourism academia continuing to investigate the politics of interpretation at dark tourism sites by engaging with interdisciplinary theories of memory, identity, and death, and by giving voice to stakeholders who have been almost entirely ignored by the dark tourism research, such as the people whose stories are represented at the site of death and suffering, and the professionals responsible for managing, curating, and interpreting these sites.

‘It is evident that tourist experiences are related to several social, cognitive and personality processes, and that the tourism literature is unclear, to say the very least, with respect to its deliberations concerning such experiences. [...] When tourists are asked about their holidays, they do however often refer to experiences, and these experiences are memories that are created in a constructive or reconstructive process within the individual’ (Larsen, 2007, p. 13). This, according to Larsen (2007, p. 15), is strong evidence to indicate that ‘tourist experiences are functions of memory processes’, and, consequently, that the construction of such memories should be a focus in tourism studies of experiences. The scarcity of academic literature on tourism and memory is surprising if one considers the close, practical, and subconscious connection between tourism and memory, and also the considerable increase in separate tourism and memory studies in the last three decades (Marschall, 2012). Consequently, the current research adopts Pearce & Packer’s (2013) view that tourism academia can greatly profit from contemporary developments in mainstream psychology, and their advice that memory is a topic which deserves more research in the tourism realm. In this regard, Marschall (2012) proposes that both personal and collective memories should be taken into consideration when

investigating how memory is attached to place, turning spaces into places which carry meaning and identity. Marschall's (2012) proposal is mirrored in the field of dark tourism by Light (2017). Indeed, as the literature review thoroughly discusses, memory is a concept closely related to place identity and place construction. However, a large majority of the previous studies on place identity have focused either on individual or collective identitarian aspects, failing to see how place identity is, in fact, a meeting point between the two. Moreover, most studies solely see place as a social construction, without taking into consideration how the physical materiality may influence the meanings attached to place. Similarly, Light (2017) reveals the scarcity of knowledge about visitors' perception of and response to the meaning-infused materiality at sites of death and suffering.

These aspects are closely related to a general lack of understanding or research on personal meanings attached to *post-trip* recollections (Wright, 2010; Light, 2017). In other words, further research is needed on how individuals attach personal meanings to their socially constructed memories through the construction and consumption of narratives (Wright, 2010). However, the tourism academia is still reluctant 'to embrace a fully reflexive stance to narrative-based research' (Wright, 2010, p. 127). This reluctance has also been noted by scholars such as Hollinshead & Jamal (2001), Tribe (2004), or Morgan & Pritchard (2005). Similarly, Light (2017) called for dark tourism scholars to include the often ignored practices of remembering and reflecting in their research endeavors.

The gaps mentioned above are assumed to be based on the fact that, when analysing visitors' experiences at (dark) heritage sites, researchers still heavily rely on the

positivist paradigm and quantitative methods which depict experience as a static process and fail to consider the complexity and subtlety of the experience (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Clarke, Dutton, & Johnston, 2014; Golańska, 2015). Light (2017) reveals such claims to be unfounded, yet he also concludes that many dark tourism studies adopt qualitative praxis rooted in positivist underpinnings. To ameliorate this, Jamal & Hollinshead (2001) ask for a dialogue on the multiple approaches, theories, methods, and techniques which can assist the travel and tourism academia in doing justice to the research topic. In the field of dark tourism, their call for multidisciplinary approaches is replicated by Light (2017) who notices that very few research attempts have adopted formal analytical techniques, such as semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, or content analysis. Importantly, Mason (2006, p. 19) puts the case for ‘a research practice informed by a multidimensional vision of context, with creative, [qualitative-driven] mixed-method, unblinkered, interdisciplinary thinking about what forms it might take, how we might research it and how we demonstrate our arguments about it. Placing explanation at the center of inquiry reflects an interest in the complexities of how and why things change and work as they do in certain contexts and circumstances (rather than, for example, what causes what). My argument is that, if we are going to improve our capacity to explain and to ask and answer rigorous and useful questions in our complex social environment, we need to understand how contexts relate to social life, and factor this understanding into our explanations’. Similarly, future tourism studies should aim at focusing ‘on the multiple networks and assemblage of the material and non-material constitution of the tourist phenomena is proposed in order to grasp the complex ramifications of tourism and to overcome the habitual methodological individualism of tourist studies as well as

teleological, detached and all-powerful conceptions of the subject’ (Pons, 2003, p. 48). As seen later in the study, even those studies which have attempted innovative phenomenological approaches to investigating experiential aspects of the tourist experience usually fail in providing clear and thorough explanations of their philosophical and/or methodological underpinnings.

Regarding the research context, the review of dark tourism literature in this study – mirrored in Light’s (2017) findings – reveals a severe lack of investigation at Communism-based sites compared to Holocaust, war, and slavery sites. This is surprising to say the least if one considers both the magnitude of Communist atrocities worldwide and the fact that most Communist regimes have collapsed relatively recently, thus rich, varied and relevant data can be obtained from people who were directly influenced by them.

1.2 Research Rationale, Aim, Question, and Objectives

The fundamental assumption of the present research is that ‘*personal and socio-cultural identities meet in place identity*’ (Buttimer, 1980, p. 167). Thus, place identity is understood as a meeting point between identity *with* place and identity *of* place. The current study proposes that personal identities in relation to a place – or identities *with* place - are contextually available in the form of *post-trip* autobiographical memories and narratives. Socio-cultural identities – forming the identity *of* place - exist in the form of transgenerational frameworks of social, cultural, and political memory and reveal

themselves to the knowledgeable interpreter in the form of signs, more precisely as indices, icons, and symbols.

Under the interpretivist umbrella, the *aim* of the investigation is to employ a multidisciplinary bricolage approach rooted in hermeneutic phenomenology and Peircean semiotic theory of signs, and based on a combination of qualitative methods, in order to explore the role of autobiographical and collective memories, personal and official narratives in the construction of identity / identities at the chosen place of dark memories. In so doing, the research attempts to provide a critical answer to the question: *How do memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction connect towards creating meaningful experiences at places of dark memories?*

The *primary objective* of the study is to develop a thorough framework of understanding the memory-narrative-place identity-place construction nexus. To tackle this objective, three *secondary objectives* are set. The first requires the conceptualization of Romanianness and Romanian Common Knowledge. The second involves the critical evaluation of Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* thesis in the context of sites associated with death and suffering. The third one is methodological and aims to advance and test Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the Phenomenological Portrait, and Peircean semiotics – rarely employed in tourism studies before – as highly adequate approaches and tools for gaining an in-depth understanding of the meaningfulness of visitors' experience with dark heritage sites.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The organizational layout of the paper is basic. Following the *first chapter*, which introduces the field of research, and depicts the problem statement, study context, and research rationale, question, and objectives, the *second chapter* of the thesis is a detailed analysis of the literature needed to comprehend the chosen topic. It begins with a discussion on how suffering has become a modern commodity and field of tourism research and continues with a review of the supply and demand perspectives on visiting sites of death and suffering. Adhering to an integrated experiential perspective, a dyadic – phenomenological and semiotic - approach is then proposed as offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Next, the issues of memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction are independently analyzed. The part on memory starts with a thorough history of the concept, followed by discussions on individual (autobiographical) and collective (social, cultural, political) aspects of memory. A framework of transgenerational collective memory labeled Romanianness and rooted in Romanian Common Knowledge is conceptualized, the latter notion understood as a function of archaic thought and lifestyle, Orthodox Christianity, Communist ideology, and post-1989 globalizing thought and lifestyle. The literature review goes on to depict the visitors as *homo narrans*, and introduce Brockmeier's (2002) three orders of narrative integration: linguistic, semiotic, and discursive. The next section of the literature review discusses the aspect of place identity construction at *les (mi)lieux de mémoire*. It begins with a critical review of Pierre Nora's concept of *les (mi)lieux de mémoire* and continues with the conceptualization of (tourism) place as a private-public dyadic entity. It then moves on to a discussion of (tourism) place identity as a meeting point between identity *with* place and

identity *of* place, which is closely related to the understanding of (tourism) place construction as a bridging function between autobiographical narrative and cultural materiality. *Chapter three* reveals the ontological, epistemological, and methodological implications of the study. This chapter revolves around the two chosen approaches – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the Peircean semiotic theory of signs – and details philosophical, theoretical, and methodological underpinnings for each of them, but also the reasoning for using them together. It also details the criteria and techniques adopted for increasing the validity of the findings. *Chapter four* includes the semiotic analysis proper of the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Romania, and the IPA analysis proper presented in the form of phenomenological portraits and a cross-case synthesis. *Chapter five* offers a critical interpretative integration of identity *with* place and identity *of* place into a holistic identitarian framework. Two models – one theoretical and one empirical – are developed to depict the connections between memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction which inject meaning in experiences with sites of death and suffering. Based on all the theoretical and empirical aspects discussed up to this stage of the study, chapter five proceeds to propose a new concept: *les milieux de mémoire sombre* (translated as ‘places of somber memories’). *Chapters six to nine* depict a series of limitations, followed by study implications, suggestions for further research, concluding thoughts, and references.

1.4 Study Context

The study is located in one of the toughest political prisons of the Communist regime in Romania, meanwhile transformed into a memorial museum. For the purpose of the current research, understanding the historical context is essential.

1.4.1 Historical Context: The Romanian Gulag

During 1881 and 1947 Romania was a constitutional monarchy and was consecutively ruled by four monarchs of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen family. With an eight million-ton annual grain production in 1938, Romania was the second largest grain exporter in Europe, and, more importantly, it was Europe's second largest oil exporter (Boldur-Lătescu, 2005). The interwar period was a prosperous historical period for Romania, which came to an abrupt end with the start of the World War II. Soon after the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was signed between Nazi Germany and the USSR in 1939, Romania was forced to give up Bessarabia (today the Republic of Moldova) and Northern Bukovina to the USSR, Northern Transylvania to Hungary, and the Cadrilater (regions in South Eastern Romania) to Bulgaria. This led to the abdication of King Carol II in September 1940 and the coming to power of General Ion Antonescu. Hoping to regain Bessarabia and Bukovina, General Antonescu co-opted Romania in Nazi Germany's military adventure into the USSR in June 1941. As the war turned and the USSR was advancing into Europe, a coup d'état against General Antonescu was organized by King Michael I with the support of the main political parties on 23rd August 1944. Even if this move led to Romania swapping the Axis powers for the Allies, the Yalta Conference in

February 1945 treated Romania as a defeated nation and obliged it to accept the presence of Soviet troops on its territory and the payment of large war reparations. The Communist Party had played an almost insignificant role in the Romanian politics before 1945. But, after the Yalta Conference, Petru Groza – an ally of the Communists – became prime minister in March 1945, following a Soviet blackmail. The following year, in November 1946, the Communists staged elections and won 80 percent of the votes. In the aftermath of the elections, the Communists focused on the extermination of historical political parties, especially the National Peasants' Party, and of those who had supported the Axis powers. General Antonescu was executed on 1st June 1946. On 30th December 1947, King Michael I was forced to abdicate, and the Communists proclaimed the Popular Republic of Romania. The name was again changed in 1965 to the Socialist Republic of Romania.

Three main time periods can be identified in the Communist ruling of Romania. During 1947 and 1952, the country was ruled by a group led by Moscow-imposed Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca, and Teohari Georgescu. In 1952, this group was removed by a tough Stalinist called Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who became the *de facto* leader of the country until his suspicious death in March 1965. The third period refers to the ruling of Nicolae Ceaușescu started in 1965 and ended with his execution in December 1989.

According to the final report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania issued in 2006, the main crimes committed by the Communist regime in Romania are:

- abandoning the national interests through complete obedience to the USSR after 1945;

- annihilating the state of law and political pluralism through faking elections and fraud;
- destructing the political parties by arresting their leaders and members;
- imposing a dictatorial regime utterly servile to Moscow and hostile to the national political and cultural values, dismantling the free syndicates and unions, destructing socio-democracy as a political movement opposed to the bolshevism promoted by the Romanian Communist Party;
- sovietising Romania entirely and forcefully, especially during 1948-1956, and imposing a despotic political system, led by a caste of profiteers loyal to the supreme leader;
- adopting a politics of extermination (physical extermination through assassination, deportation, imprisonment, forced labor) of certain social categories (the landowners, the middle class, peasants, intellectuals, politicians, clerics, students) based on the principle of class struggle;
- persecuting ethnic, religious, cultural minorities;
- implementing a planned extermination program for political prisoners;
- implementing the extermination of the partisans who formed the anti-Communist resistance in the Carpathian Mountains (1945-1962);
- repressing the cults and religions and abolishing the Greco-Catholic Church;
- arresting, assassinating, imprisoning, or deporting the peasants who opposed the collectivization process, and the violent oppression of the peasants' revolts (1949-1962);
- implementing the extermination or deportation of Jews and ethnic Germans;

- repressing culture, imposing extreme censorship, arresting and publicly humiliating intellectuals who refused to join or opposed the Communist Party (1945-1989);
- repressing the student movements in 1956;
- repressing the workers' movements in Valea Jiului (1977), Braşov (1987), and other strikes in the 1980s;
- repressing and assassinating dissidents and opponents in the 1970s and 1980s;
- demolishing the cultural and historical heritage in Bucharest and other large cities;
- establishing special camps for orphan or disabled children;
- imposing abnormal norms for 'rational alimentation', starving the population, limiting heat, gas, and electricity;
- promoting material and moral misery and decay, and fear as instruments for maintaining power; establishing an NKVD-style secret militia called 'Securitate';
- massacring the Romanian citizens, following the direct order of Nicolae Ceauşescu and with the approval from the leaders of the Executive Political Committee of the Romanian Communist Party during the 1989 Revolution.

All in all, the Communist regime in Romania transformed the nation into a large-scale concentration camp (Figure 1), a part of what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn called *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973).

Due to the intense efforts of the Communists of covering their trails, the numbers of victims remains unknown. Certain assumptions are provided by Mătrescu (2008). According to him, the number of Romanians who suffered persecutions during the

Communist regime is over 3 million. Between 1945 and 1954, approximately 500,000 Romanians were deported to camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan. During the period 1946-1947, between 200,000 and 350,000 Romanians perished because of Stalin's induced famine. The armed resistance in the Carpathian mountains led to other considerable victims. Mătrescu (2008) estimates the total number of victims in the Romanian Gulag to be around 900,000. Between 150,000 and 200,000 of them died in the approximately 120 Communist prisons and labor camps, one of them being the Sighet Prison, meanwhile transformed into a memorial museum.

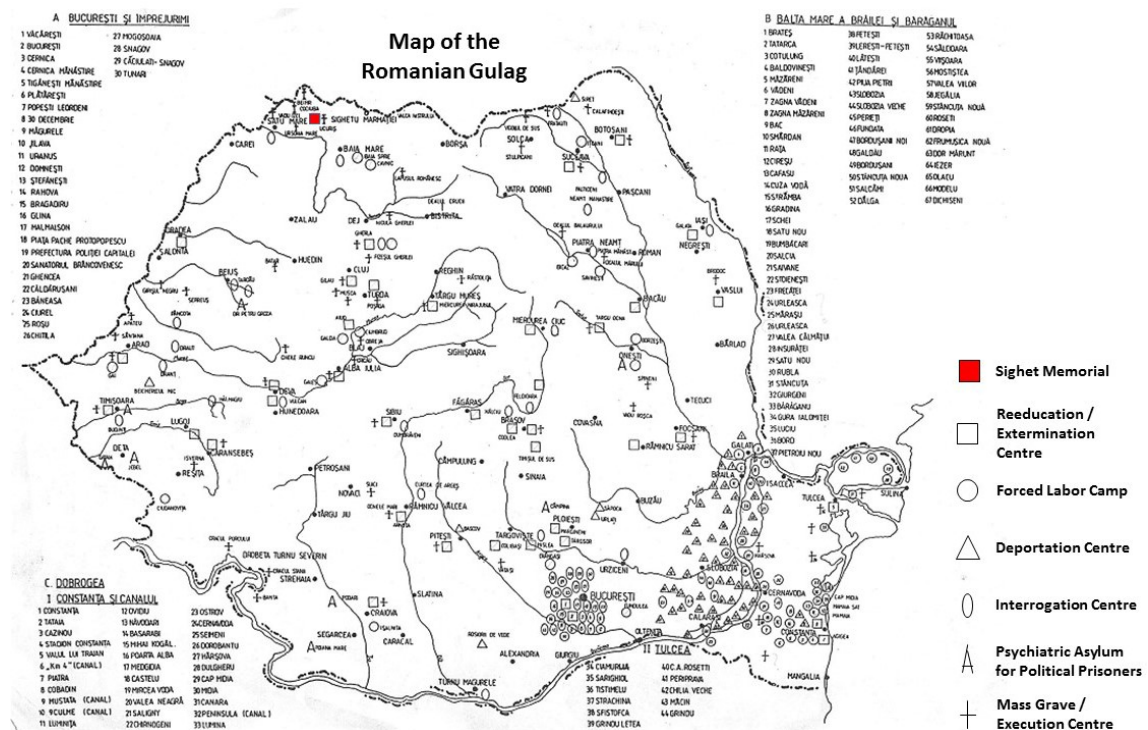


Figure 1: Map of the Romanian Gulag

(adapted from the final report of The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, 2006)

1.4.2 The Sighet Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance

Two relevant distinct periods in the history of the researched site are identified. Between 1948 and 1977, it was used as a penitentiary for political prisoners under the Communist regime. Since 1993, it was transformed into the Sighet Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance. Each period is detailed below.

1.4.2.1 Communist Prison (1948-1977)

The Sighet Prison was established in 1897 by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, on the occasion of the ‘First Magyar Millennium’, as a prison for criminal offenders (Sighet Memorial, 2015a). After World War I, it functioned as a prison for common criminals, and, after World War II, the repatriation of former prisoners and deportees from the Soviet Union was done through Sighet (Sighet Memorial, 2015a).

On the 4th December 1945, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the newly established Communist regime in Romania issued a decree for reclassifying penitentiaries, which is considered the unofficial establishment act for political prisons. According to a 1948-reclassification, Sighet became a prison of maximum severity. In August 1948, as the Communist regime was strengthening its ruling, the Sighet Prison became a place of imprisonment for students, pupils, and peasants from the Maramureş County of Romania (Sighet Memorial, 2015a).

In 1949, a new reclassification of penitentiaries was conducted, this time according to socio-professional, age, and political orientation. Sighet was chosen to host

the interwar elite. On 5th and 6th May 1950 over one hundred dignitaries from the whole country were brought to the Sighet penitentiary, followed, in October-November 1950, by 45-50 bishops and Greek-Catholic and Roman-Catholic priests (Sighet Memorial, 2015a). The list of convict included, among others, Iuliu Maniu (leader of the National Peasants' Party and former Prime Minister of Romania), Constantin Argetoianu (former Prime Minister of Romania), Gheorghe Tătărescu (leader of the National Liberal Party-Tătărescu), Gheorghe I. Brătianu (politician and historian, leader of the National Liberal Party-Brătianu), Ilie Lazăr (leader of the National Peasants' Party), Corneliu Coposu (former secretary to Iuliu Maniu, leader of the National Peasants' Party after 1989), Ion Mihalache (leader of the National Peasants' Party, former Minister of the Interior), Ion Nistor (historian and former Minister of Cults and the Arts), Mihail Manoilescu (former Minister of Foreign Affairs), Ioan Mihail Racoviță (General and former Minister of Defence), Dimitrie Burilleanu (former Governor of the National Bank of Romania), Iuliu Hossu (Greek-Catholic bishop of Cluj-Gherla), Ion Bălan (Greek-Catholic bishop of Lugoj), Alexandru Lepădatu, Ioan Lupaș, George Fotino (members of the Romanian Academy), Dinu Brătianu (politician and historian), and Pantelimon Halippa (president of *Sfatul Țării* during which Bessarabia unified with Romania in 1918). All were highly respected both within Romania and internationally, and many of them had actively participated in the incorporation of Transylvania, Bukovina, and Bessarabia into what became known as Greater Romania (*România Mare*) in 1918. They were convicted to heavy punishments, some even without a proper trial. Many of them were more than 60 years old at the time of arrest.

Colloquially known as the 'Danube Colony' (*'Colonia Dunărea'*), the penitentiary was considered a 'special work unit' (*'unitate de muncă specială'*), but in reality was a place of extermination for the country's political, economic, cultural, spiritual, and military elites seen as dangerous 'counter-revolutionary' enemies of the state (Sighet Memorial, 2015a).

The prisoners were kept in unwholesome conditions in unheated cells, deprived of medical care, miserably fed, and stopped from lying down on the beds. Methods of interrogation and torture included: beatings with rubber batons or wooden clubs over the head, back, palms, or soles of the feet; the pulling of finger and toenails; electrical shocks; continuous staring into strong light projectors; the burning of the soles of the feet; burning cigarettes on scrotum or abdomen; beatings over testicles; hanging the victim upside down; eating very hot soup while on the knees, hands tied at one's back; ingesting excessive salt, without the access to water; ingesting own or others' urine and feces; isolation in 'black' rooms where one had to stand for days without access to light (Longin Popescu, 2014). Finally, shutters were placed on the windows, so that only the sky was visible. Humiliation and ridicule were part of the extermination programme (Sighet Memorial, 2015a).

Between 1950 and 1955, 53 prisoners perished because of this harsh treatment. Their bodies were secretly buried, at night time, in mass graves. Even more, death certificates were developed only later, in 1957, with fake names and reasons of death. The mass graves are yet to be identified, but, according to local legend, many of victims were

buried 2.5 kilometers outside the town, in what became known as 'The Paupers' Cemetery' (*'Cimitirul Săracilor'*) (Sighet Memorial, 2015b).

In 1955, following the Geneva Convention and the admission of People's Republic of Romania to the UN, some pardons were granted. Some of the political prisoners were set free under continuous surveillance, some were transferred to other places, while others were kept under house arrest. Sighet once again became an ordinary law penitentiary. However, political prisoners continued to be incarcerated in the following years, many being secretly kept in the local psychiatric hospital (Sighet Memorial, 2015a).

In 1977, the prison was closed, and the buildings were turned into a broom factory and salt warehouse, finally becoming an abandoned ruin until 1993, when the foundations for The Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance were set (Sighet Memorial, 2015a).

1.4.2.2 Memorial Museum (1993 – present)

Established by Ana Blandiana at the suggestion of the Council of Europe, the Civic Academy Foundation took over the ruins of the former prison in 1993, with a project of transforming it into a museum (Figure 2). In the initial years of the project, the primary source of financial support were Romanians exiled to the West during the Communist regime, such as Mișu Cârciog, Vlad Drăgoescu, and Sergiu Grossu (Sighet Memorial, 2015c). Following the declaration of the Sighet Memorial as an 'ensemble of national

interest' in 1997, law 95/1997 was implemented according to which the Memorial receives a minimum allowance from the state budget (Sighet Memorial, 2015c).

The fundamental role of gathering material evidence to be displayed – such as oral history recordings, photographs, historical documents, realia, letters, period newspapers - was assumed by the International Centre for Studies Into Communism (Sighet Memorial, 2015d). They also took over the educational and research roles of the Sighet Memorial. More precisely, they constantly organize workshops, seminars, symposia, and meetings, as well as publishing books of eye-witness accounts, research, statistics, and documents about the anti-Communist resistance and its repression (Sighet Memorial, 2015d). To date, the Centre has made over five thousand hours of recordings, published 35,000 pages in book form, and collected tens of thousands of documents (Sighet Memorial, 2015d).

The first sections of the Sighet Memorial were opened to the public in 1997. Meanwhile, each cell has become a museum room in which aspects of the Communist regime and the anti-Communist resistance are thematically and chronologically displayed. Also part of the Memorial is 'the Paupers' Cemetery' situated 2.5 kilometers outside the town. As already mentioned, this site is believed to be the collective resting place for many of those who perished in the Sighet Prison. Nowadays, it has been turned into a symbolic site of commemoration.



Figure 2: The Sighet Prison in Ruins

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The current section critically reviews the literature needed for a thorough understanding of the discussed topic. Most of the previous research in dark tourism has adopted either a supply or a demand perspective. Recently, an increasing number of researchers have proposed the integration of these two perspectives into an experiential approach as the way forward. The current study builds on this development to argue that visitors' experience with dark heritage sites can be understood by analyzing the connection between memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction. Each of these concepts is individually examined below.

2.1 Dark Tourism: Towards an Integrated Experiential Perspective

Scholars have proposed death and suffering as both a fundamental human experience and an essential part of popular culture which triggers the interest of traveling to sites of dark heritage. A vast majority of tourism academia exploring the phenomenon of traveling to such sites has been either supply or demand-focused. The current section reviews these approaches and makes a case for an integrated supply-demand experiential approach.

2.1.1 Death and Suffering as Modern Commodities for a Traveling Public

Death and suffering are existential grounds of human experience, but also master subjects of our mediatized times (Nell, 2006; Stone, 2012a). On the one hand, death exposes the most fundamental social and cultural practices and values, becoming a catalyst that, ‘when put into contact with any cultural order, precipitates out the central beliefs and concerns of a people’ (Kearl, 2014, p. 1). On the other hand, watching and reading about death and suffering - especially suffering that exists somewhere else - has become a form of entertainment (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996), and a prominent and integral part of the contemporary popular culture (Durkin, 2003; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Thus, communication technologies ignite the initial sparks of interest in murder and violent death for a traveling public (Seaton, 1996; Blom, 2000; Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2007; Robb, 2009; Light, 2017). Consequently, researchers have recorded a constant increase in the fascination of tourists with sites and events linked with death, suffering, or disaster (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Dann, 2005; Cohen, 2011; Stone, 2011; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014). This boost in demand for gazing at real or recreated death is met by the ever-increasing supply of sites of death, disaster, and atrocities (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). Smith (1998, p. 205) suggests that memories of warfare remain strong across generations and, because of this, sites or destinations associated with war probably constitute ‘the largest single category of tourist attractions in the world’. Linked to this, the current study proposes that these positive trends can critically be connected to what Winter (2007) labeled as ‘memory boom’. This was called the postmodern commodification of death (Lennon & Foley, 2000), which essentially suggests that ‘whereas people in traditional societies ate their dead, incorporating them into the life of

the living, modern society vomits them out, designating them as *Other*' (Bauman, 1992, p. 131).

2.1.2 Death and Suffering as Fields of Investigation for Tourism Researchers

The increase in the fascination with and supply of sites of death and suffering is matched by a sustained rise in the popularity of this phenomenon among tourism researchers (Light, 2017). In line with Smith's (1998) suggestion above, Light's (2017) review of dark tourism publications for the period 1996-2016 clearly shows that destinations and sites associated with war constitute by a large margin the most popular type of site in dark tourism investigations. This is mirrored in the amount of war tourism-related research conducted on battlefield tourism in general (Fyall, Prideaux, & Timothy, 2006; Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011; Miles, 2014; Fallon & Robinson, 2017), and on destinations and sites associated with war such as Vietnam (Henderson, 2000; Agrusa, Tanner, & Dupuis, 2006; Schwenkel, 2006), Bosnia (Johnston, 2011, 2016; Naef, 2014; Volcic, Erjavec, & Peak, 2014; Kamber, Karafotias, & Tsitoura, 2016), Hiroshima (Wu, Funck, & Hayashi, 2014; Yoshida, Bui, & Lee, 2016; Schäfer, 2016), Singapore (Henderson, 2007; Muzaini, Teo, & Yeoh, 2007), Palestine and Israel (Isaac, 2010; Isaac & Ashworth, 2011; Mansfeld & Korman, 2015), Nanjing (Fengqi, 2009; Zhang, Yang, Zheng, & Zheng, 2016; Zheng, Zhang, Zhang, & Qian, 2017), Gettysburg (Chronis, 2005, 2008, 2012b), Waterloo (Seaton, 1999), the River Kwai (Braithwaite & Leiper, 2010), or the Korean DMZ (Lee, 2006; Lee, Yoon, & Lee, 2007; Bigley, Lee, Chon, & Yoon, 2010). However, Stone (2006), Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood (2011), and Light (2017) agree

that war-related attractions are just a segment of tourist sites associated with death and suffering. Researchers frequently mention other types of sites, such as prisons (Shackley, 2001; Strange & Kempa, 2003; Gould, 2014; Casella & Fennelly, 2016), sites associated with slavery (Bruner, 1996; Dann & Seaton, 2001; Teye & Timothy, 2004; Richards, 2005; Yankholmes & Akyeampong, 2010; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Forsdick, 2014; Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015a, 2015b), sites associated with genocide (Hughes, 2008; Sharpley, 2012; Friedrich & Johnston, 2013; McKinney, 2014; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016), sites associated with serial murder (Gibson, 2006; Kim & Butler, 2015), sites associated with contemporaneous danger and conflict (Buda & McIntosh, 2013; Buda, d’Hauteserre, & Johnston, 2014; Buda, 2015a; Buda, 2015b; Buda & Shim, 2015), and sites associated with natural or man-made disasters (Rittichainuwat, 2008; Robbie, 2008; Goatcher & Brunsden, 2011; Stone, 2013; Biran, Liu, Li, & Eichhorn, 2014; Yankovska & Hannam, 2014; Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu, & Guo, 2016). As universal symbols of suffering and genocide, the Holocaust-related sites have been thoroughly researched from different tourism perspectives by scholars such as Ashworth (1996, 2002), Beech (2001), Huener (2003), Pollock (2003), Buntman (2008), Biran, Poria, & Oren (2011), Cohen (2011), Podoshen & Hunt (2011), Oren & Shani (2012), Allar (2013), Kidron (2013), Busby & Devereux (2015), and Nawijn, Isaac, van Liempt, & Gridnevskiy (2016). Scholars have also investigated aspects of dark tourism at sites associated to Dracula (Light, 2007), at attractions linked to celebrity deaths (Alderman, 2002b; Levitt, 2010; Best, 2013), at von Hagens’ ‘Body Worlds’ Exhibition (Goulding, Saren, & Lindridge, 2013), or at the London Dungeons (Stone, 2006; Ivanova & Light, 2018).

2.1.3 Contextual Research Gap: Sites of Death and Suffering Associated with Communist Regimes

Reviewing the dark tourism literature reveals one significant gap: the relative inexistence of studies focused on sites of death and atrocities linked to Communist regimes. Only a few papers have tangentially touched upon such sites or events. Light (2000a, 2000b) looks at different ways of dealing with an unwanted Communist past through tourism in Romania, Hungary, and Germany. Hall (1994), Tunbridge & Ashworth (1996), and Morgan & Pritchard (1998) mention the politics of tourism in identity (re)construction in post-Communist Central and East Europe. Knudsen (2010) offers the example of a tourism project in Krakow Poland - The Crazy Guides Communism Tours - to propose one possible way of promoting a district through dealing with an unwanted past, an undesirable heritage. McKenzie (2013) investigates whether 'Soviet' tourism in the Baltic states is based on remembrance or nostalgia. Frank (2016) details the politics and commodification of heritage surrounding the Berlin Wall. As Light's (2017) comprehensive review of the progress in dark tourism academia, the investigative focus has mostly been on sites and destinations at the darkest end of Stone's (2006) spectrum of dark tourism supply. Among them, only two tackle the atrocities of a Communist regime in the context of tourism, and both investigate the same site: Hughes' (2008) and Isaac & Çakmak's (2016) explorations of tourist practices at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide Crimes in Cambodia. Considering that many Communist regimes have collapsed much more recently compared to other totalitarian regimes and that sites associated with Communist repression are likely to continue to influence present-day societies in very complex ways, this scarcity of Communism-focused tourism research

appears inexplicable. The current study builds on this gap and provides one of the few tourism research endeavors focused on a site of death and suffering linked to a Communist regime.

2.1.4 A Supply Perspective

When attempting to label and categorize macabre-related tourism activity, current literature mainly follows a supply perspective (Sharpley, 2009; Biran, Poria, & Oren, 2011; Zhang, Yang, Zheng, & Zheng, 2016). Rojek (1993, p. 136) introduces the concept of ‘Black Spots’, or ‘the commercial developments of grave sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death’. Blom (2000, p. 26) defines ‘morbid tourism’ as ‘an attraction-focused artificial morbidity-related tourism [...] which quickly attracts large numbers of people’. Dann (1994, p. 61) refers to this phenomenon as ‘milking the macabre’. Alternative terms include: ‘grief tourism’ (Lewis, 2008), ‘death tourism’ (Sion, 2014), ‘trauma tourism’ (Clark, 2009), ‘dark travel’ (Clarke, Dutton, & Johnston, 2014), or ‘thanatological tourism’ (Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu, & Guo, 2016). The most popular term is Lennon & Foley’s (2000, p.3) ‘dark tourism’, a phenomenon they had previously defined as ‘the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites’ (Foley & Lennon, 1996, p. 198), and ‘Tourism associated with sites of death, disaster, and depravity’ (Lennon & Foley, 1999, p. 46). Stone (2006, p. 146) broadly defines it as the ‘act of travel to tourist sites associated with death, suffering or the seemingly macabre’. Similarly, Preece & Price (2005) define dark tourism as ‘travel to sites associated with death, disaster, acts of

violence, tragedy, scenes of death and crimes against humanity’, while (Robb, 2009, p. 51) proposes that dark tourism ‘involves visiting destinations at which violence is the main attraction’.

Given the difficulty in attaching an all-embracing label to the vast diversity of dark sites and attractions such as those presented in the 2.1.2 section of this paper, attempts have been made to categorize them according to intensities of dark tourism. Revolving around site authenticity and chronological distance, Miles (2002, p. 1175) distinguishes between ‘dark’ tourism, based on sites ‘*associated with* death, disaster and depravity’ such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and ‘darker’ tourism, based on ‘*sites of* death, disaster and depravity’, such as the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau. Building upon the work of Miles (2002), Stone (2006) offers a spectrum of dark tourism supply, ranging from lightest sites or ‘dark fun factories’ (p. 152), such as the London Dungeons and the Dracula Park in Romania, to darkest sites or ‘dark camps of genocide’ (p. 157) – *in situ*, highly ideological, offering an educational experience with little interpretation, such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau or Tuol Sleng. Other scholars have attempted to conceptualize sub-forms of dark tourism, such as: ‘prison tourism’ (Strange & Kempa, 2003), ‘genocide tourism’ (Beech, 2009), ‘disaster tourism’ (Robbie, 2008), ‘favela tourism’ (Robb, 2009), ‘suicide tourism’ (Miller & Gonzalez, 2013), ‘pagan tourism’ (Laws, 2013), ‘atomic tourism’ (Freeman, 2014), ‘dystopian dark tourism’ (Podoshen, Venkatesh, Wallin, Andrzejewski, & Jin, 2015).

Despite the obvious progress in the field, the dark tourism literature was found to be ‘descriptive’ (Apostolakis, 2003, p. 799), and ‘theoretically fragile, raising more

questions than it answers' (Sharpley, 2005, p. 216). Also, the dark tourism phenomenon was argued to 'lack a theoretical relationship to wider studies of violence and by-standing' (Keil, 2005, p. 481), while 'the term has become increasingly diluted and fuzzy' (Sharpley, 2009, p. 6). The absence of conceptual and functional consensus among researchers and the resulting ambiguity of scope have led Ashworth & Isaac (2015, p. 317) to argue that dark tourism research has reached a point where 'a quality of darkness could be attributed actually or potentially, to some extent, almost everywhere.' Additionally, by labeling certain tourists or sites as 'dark', an implicit claim is made that there is something disturbing, suspicious, morbid or perverse about them (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010). This is because dark tourism is usually associated with 'disturbing practices and morbid products (and experiences) within the tourism domain' (Stone, 2006, p. 146), which transforms it in something 'transgressive, morally suspect, and pathological' (Seaton, 2009, p. 595). Moreover, Seaton (2009) and Ashworth & Isaac (2015) agree that conceptualizations and typologies focused on the 'dark' aspect of the phenomenon fail to understand the fact that sites do not have intrinsic or objective darkness. Instead, the perception of 'darkness' is socially and normatively constructed (Jamal & Lelo, 2011). Similarly, Light (2017, p. 281) argues that 'each visitor will experience a site in different ways so that >>dark<< places will have a multitude of different meanings for different visitors'. The lack of consideration for the diversity of individuals' motives and inner experiences is precisely the focus of Biran, Poria, & Oren's (2011) criticism of supply perspectives of dark tourism. Importantly for the current study, no matter what shade, typology, or conceptualization they find themselves under, what is

certain is that all sites of death, suffering, and atrocities belong to and construct what Lowenthal (1985) calls a geography of memory.

2.1.5 A Demand Perspective

Attention has also been focused, albeit to a lesser extent, on the demand perspective which deals with visitors' motivations for seeking out such sites. Seaton (1996, p. 240) advanced the notion of 'thanatourism', defined as 'travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death'. He perceives the motivation behind thanatourism to be *thanatopsis*, or the 'contemplation of death' (p. 235), while Seaton & Lennon (2004, p. 68) perceive it to be *schadenfreude*, 'that secret pleasure of witnessing the misfortunes of others'. In the same vein, Best (2007, p. 38) defines 'thanatourism' as 'individuals who are motivated primarily to experience the death and suffering of others for the purpose of enjoyment, pleasure, and satisfaction'. Seaton (1996, 1999) goes on to distinguish five thanatouristic travel activities: travel to witness public enactments of death; travel to see the sites of mass or individual deaths, after they have occurred; travel to internment sites of, and memorials to, the dead; travel to view the material evidence, or symbolic representations of death, in locations unconnected with their occurrence; travel for re-enactments or simulation of death. Such perspectives seem to reconfirm Korstanje & Babu's (2015) statement that dark tourism 'entails fascination with death as a primary reason of attraction'.

However, Slade (2003) criticizes this understanding of the phenomenon for seeing everyone at or near a place associated with death as necessarily thanatourists or as having

necessarily thanatouristic motivations. Indeed, some studies depict fascination with death as one driver among others. For example, Dann (1998) offers a comprehensive, yet highly descriptive, list of eight possible drivers, including fear of phantoms, the search for novelty, nostalgia, the celebration of crime and deviance, basic bloodlust, and dicing with death. Ashworth (2004, p. 96) summarizes a wide range of motivations behind the demand perspective: from ‘pilgrimage of penance’, ‘quest for identity’, empathy, curiosity and search for knowledge, ‘a social mission to shape more responsible futures’, to much darker and less socially acceptable motives where gratification is obtained from suffering and violence. In other cases, visitors’ sought experiences might be completely devoid of interest in death (Biran, Poria, & Oren, 2011). For example, Rittichainuwat (2008) found that visitors to Phuket, Thailand, after the tsunami were not motivated by death, but were curious to see the magnitude of a natural disaster. Likewise, Slade (2003, p. 793) showed that Australians’ and New Zealanders’ visits to the Gallipoli battlefield are motivated by patriotism, by nationhood, by ‘discovering who they are, where they came from, and what the meaning of their nations might be in the modern world’. A fundamental study is Light’s (2017) comprehensive review of dark tourism progress for the 1996-2016 period. In the mentioned order, he identifies the most commonly reported motives to be: an interest to learn and understand about what happened at the site, curiosity, a desire to connect to the site, general or leisure motives, (secular) pilgrimage, an interest in history or culture, remembrance, and a sense of duty or moral obligation (Light, 2017). Based on this, he draws conclusions which can hardly be combated. Firstly, he concludes that ‘there is little evidence that an interest in death (including morbid curiosity) is an important motive for visiting places and attractions that are labeled dark’ (Light, 2017, p. 285).

Secondly, he emphasizes that situations when people travel specifically because of an interest in death are rare (Light, 2017). Thirdly, he also concludes that: ‘In many cases, the motives for visiting dark sites and attractions appear to be little different from those of heritage tourists’ (Light, 2017, p. 287).

2.1.6 An Integrated Experiential Perspective

Although the increase in publications is evident, researchers have not yet come to an agreement on whether the discussed phenomenon is supply or demand-driven (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Nor is it clear whether there has indeed been a measurable growth in tourist interest in death, disaster, and atrocity, or there is merely an ever-increasing number of tourists and supply of such sites (Sharpley, 2005; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). In this regard, Bowman and Pezzullo (2010, p. 190) argue that ‘it is possible that people are no more interested in touring sites associated with death than they have always been’.

Given the complex nature of dark tourism and attempting to move beyond such debates, scholars are beginning to agree on the need to consider both demand and supply elements in attempting to construct any framework of dark tourism (Miles, 2002; Stone, 2006; Sharpley, 2009; Biran & Poria, 2012). One such integrative attempt is Sharpley’s (2005, p. 225) identification of different shades of dark tourism (‘pale’, ‘grey tourism supply’, ‘grey tourism demand’, ‘black’), dependent on both the tourist’s level of interest in death (‘palest’ or ‘darkest’ demand) and the extent to which an attraction is developed in order to exploit that interest (‘accidental’ or ‘purposeful’ supply), with darkest or black tourism occurring where experiences are purposefully supplied to meet visitors’

fascination with death. Biran, Poria, & Oren (2011, p. 821) argue that this ‘integrated supply-demand perspective’ adopts an *experiential* understanding of dark tourism. In this regard, scholars such as Seaton (2002), Walter (2009), and Johnston (2013) emphasize the usefulness of investigating experiences – rather than motivations – for understanding dark tourism. Similarly, Stone (2016) argues that acknowledging the importance of the relationship between tourism and death, and what this relationship can reveal about contemporary societies is more significant than defining concepts. This is reinforced by his previous statement according to which dark tourism is ‘a multi-disciplinary academic lens through which to scrutinize a broad range of social, cultural, geographical, anthropological, political, managerial and historical concerns’ (Stone, 2013, p. 309). This is reinforced by Sharpley and Stone (2009, p. 251) who propose that the importance of dark tourism research lies ‘in what it reveals or may reveal, about the relationships between life and death, the living and dead, and the institutions or processes that mediate, either at the individual or societal level, between life and death.’ Similarly, Biran, Poria, & Oren (2011, p. 832) argue that ‘it is not death or the dead that should be considered, but living peoples’ perception of them’. When analyzing visitors’ perception of sites associated with death and suffering across the dark tourism studies published between 1996-2016, Light (2017) concludes that many visitors have a complex, multi-layered, and deep engagement with the places they encounter. They seek to understand, connect, and attribute meaning, which ensures a profoundly significant and meaningful visiting experience (Light, 2017). All in all, it is suggested that - due to its location within the realms of meaning-making - dark tourism is better perceived as a mediating institution

between the living and the dead, between the Self and the Significant Other Dead (Walter, 2009; Stone, 2011).

The perceptions of death and commemorative engagement are socially, culturally and politically constructed (Jamal & Lelo, 2011; Stone, 2012a; Du, Littlejohn, & Lennon, 2013). These differences across cultures are widely documented across a wide range of death-related research disciplines (Howard & Scott, 1965; Pagli & Abramovitch, 1984; Kalish, 1985; Parkes, Laungani, & Young, 1997; Kagawa-Singer, 1998; Gire, 2002; Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006; Robben, 2017). For example, Stone (2012a) argues that contemporary Western societies have been dominated by the Freudian paradigm which encourages individuals to let go of their attachments to the dead and move on. Contrastingly, Hsu, O'Conner, & Lee (2009) show how in China the deceased continue to exist alongside the living through the beliefs and practices of ancestral veneration. Even if the cross-cultural perceptions of death have been well documented, Light (2017, p. 292) emphasizes the reluctance of many dark tourism researchers 'to seek to understand the broader social, cultural and political context in which a place of death or suffering is presented to visitors', and to use formal analytical techniques such as semiotic analysis, discourse analysis or content analysis. Taking these aspects into consideration, the current study acknowledges the need to place any death-related investigation into the social, cultural, and political context of the chosen location, and the importance of analyzing experiences with the Sighet Memorial Museum through a mix of analytical practices.

2.1.7 Working Definition for Dark Tourism

Having reviewed the demand and supply trends in academic research, and adhered to scholars' call for integrated experiential perspectives, the current study employs the following working definition: *'Dark tourism is concerned with encountering spaces of death or calamity that have political or historical significance, and that continue to impact upon the living'* (Stone, 2016, p. 23). This definition appears to closely resemble Tarlow's (2005, p.48) definition of dark tourism as 'visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives'. Both are expansive definitions of the phenomenon which revolve around human geography and manage to touch upon the need to integrate the demand and supply perspectives into an experiential model of understanding. What differentiates the two definitions in fundamental ways to the current study is the use of 'encountering' instead of 'visitations'. If the former portrays the place as a meeting point between the visitor and the materiality of the site where experience involves an active exchange of meaning between them, the latter is perceived as tourist-centric. In other words, it is the perceptual difference between experience *with* a place and experience *at* a place. It is particularly this distinction which makes the chosen definition relevant to the present paper. Also, the inclusion of the political aspect in the definition is another reason for choosing the former over the latter. This is because the politics of museal interpretation are an important consideration of the study.

2.2 (Dark) Heritage: A Dyadic Experiential Understanding

As the previous section has shown, there is a strong convergence between dark tourism and heritage tourism. This is explicitly and repeatedly reinforced in Light's (2017) review of dark tourism literature between 1996-2016. Consequently, the current study builds on Biran, Poria, & Oren's (2011) proposal that a meaningful understanding of tourist experiences at dark sites can be obtained from heritage sites-related literature. After reviewing different facets of the visitor experience at (dark) heritage sites, the study adheres to a definition of experience which allows for a dyadic conceptualization. More precisely, the current paper understands the experience with (dark) heritage sites as a composite between a phenomenological and a semiotic aspect. Each of them is critically portrayed in this section, together with relevant aspects related to interpretation and authenticity. Importantly, only conceptual details of phenomenology and semiotics are discussed in this section. In-depth philosophical and methodological considerations – together with critical reviews of phenomenological and semiotic research attempts in tourism academia – are presented in the Methodology section.

2.2.1 Visitor Experience at (Dark) Heritage Sites

Heritage tourism is perceived as a carrier of historical values from the past into the future (Nuryanti, 1996). As part of a 'symbolic system' (Park, 2010, p. 119), heritage supports the creation and recreation of shared values in society (Geertz, 1973; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Therefore, people's experience of heritage tourism preserves and reconstructs the collective memory of a social group by enabling its members to conceive,

imagine and confirm their belonging to the group (Palmer, 2005). Thus, it is widely accepted among researchers that heritage places and events are commonly used tools for building nationalism and patriotism among domestic tourists (Chronis, 2005; Timothy & Boyd, 2006; Park, 2010). Particularly, nation-states actively support tourism to sites of national death and suffering as they ‘seek to construct and promote a national past to encourage allegiance to the political entity of the state and the social community of the nation’ by constructing and promoting a shared collective memory (Light, 2017, p. 284). In turn, this transforms heritage into an inherently contested phenomenon, as individuals or groups may attribute different and sometimes dissonant meanings to sites of death and suffering (Ashworth, 2003). These aspects are further discussed in the section 2.3.3.3 entitled ‘The Political Aspect of Memory’.

Scholars have argued that visitors are heterogeneous in the personal meaning that each of them brings to the site, and in their perceptions on the legitimacy of the violence being presented, and, thus, the experience of dark heritage sites is not uniform or objective, but subjective and extremely individual (Prentice, Witt, & Hamer, 1998; Goulding, 1999; Uriely, 2005; Robb, 2009; Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Du, Littlejohn, & Lennon, 2013). As already discussed in this paper, it is usually an interest not in the manner, but rather in the meaning or implication of death that is fundamental to the experience (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2001; Sharpley, 2009; Light, 2017). Some of these meanings and implications include: the search for national identity (Urry, 1994; Palmer, 1999; Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2005; Poria & Ashworth, 2009), the desire to ‘feel connected to ancestors and ancestral roots’ (McCain & Ray, 2003, p. 713), the need to validate past events which seem too horrific to comprehend (Keil, 2005), and nostalgia

(Gerster, 2005; Aden, *et al.*, 2009). Kugelmass (1996, p. 200) mentions the experiences of catharsis and personal transformation when talking about the Jews visiting Eastern Europe ‘to see the past, to pay homage to ancestors and to heal [...] a radical rupture in the memory fabric of their culture’. Similarly, Prideaux (2007, p. 17) argues that visitors at battlefield sites may have meaningful and uplifting experiences, based on their needs ‘to remember comrades; to rekindle memories of loved ones who fell in battle; to ponder on the feats of those whom they will never know; and to gloat on victory or lament over defeat’. These studies reinforce Poria, Butler, & Airey’s (2003, 2004) argument that whether the site is perceived by visitors as part of their heritage or not is fundamentally important in determining their experience. Although bringing an important contribution towards understanding visitors’ experience at dark heritage sites, they fail in acknowledging the social, cultural and political aspects of transgenerational collective memory which frame personal experience (Light, 2017). Thus, they tend to depict experience as a relatively static process, existing in a bubble in time and space. Fundamentally, the memories of traumatic and difficult-to-comprehend deaths haunt society and represent the quintessence of the dark tourism experience (Walter, 2009; Stone, 2012a), while the act of remembrance and memorialization leads to strong bonds between people and place, and allows dark tourism to occur (Stone, 2006; Lewicka, 2008). Moreover, Uzzell & Bellantyne (1998) argue that the meaning of places can change over time, as they become less of a memorial and more of a tourist attraction, less to do with remembrance and more to do with day-trip excursions.

All in all, it can be argued that the analysis of dark heritage sites – previously named ‘heritage that hurts’ (Uzzell & Bellantyne, 1998), ‘dissonant heritage’ (Tunbridge

& Ashworth, 1996) or ‘heritage of atrocity’ (Ashworth, 2004) – from an experiential approach, rather than purely from a classical descriptive demand or supply approach, is more appropriate and beneficial, as this approach relies on the strength of both the push and pull factors in understanding and enhancing visitors’ experiences (Apostolakis, 2003). This is in line with Tunbridge & Ashworth’s (1996, p. 69) statement that heritage sites ‘must shift from the uses of heritage to the users themselves, and thus from the producers to the consumers’. More importantly, the perception of travel experience has shifted from an escape from place to a ‘place-based experience’, which ‘entails negotiations of meaning, identity, and otherness in specific places’ (Minca & Oakes, 2006, p. 1).

The tourist experience is an intricate and multifaceted process which encompasses, is influenced by and influences a complex range of elements (Jennings, 2006; Selstad, 2007; Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Across academia, the tourist experience has been seen as a shift from everyday experience (Cohen, 1979; Graburn, 2001), an interaction between destinations – the site of experience, and tourists – the actors of experience (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003), or as a process which provides complex place-based emotions, memories, and experiences (Noy, 2007). The phenomenon has also been defined as ‘the culmination of a given experience’ formed by tourists ‘when they are visiting and spending time in a given tourists location’ (Graefe & Vaske, 1987, cited in Volo, 2009, p. 114), ‘a complex combination of factors that shape the tourist’s feeling and attitude towards his or her visit’ (Page, Brunt, Busby, & Connell, 2001, p. 412), or ‘an example of hedonic consumption’ (Go, 2005, cited in Volo, 2009, p. 114). Tourist experience has been tackled from different perspectives, including phenomenology

(Cohen, 1979; Masberg & Silverman, 1996; Suvantola, 2002), identity (Wearing & Wearing, 2001; McCabe & Stokoe, 2004; Knudsen, Metro-Roland, Soper, & Greer, 2008), memory-making (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005), performance and place-making (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004; Minca & Oakes, 2006), and narration (Bendix, 2002; Cary, 2004; Chronis, 2008, 2012a). Nevertheless, the tourist experience remains ‘deceptively ambiguous’ (Selstad, 2007, p. 21), and ‘there is no single theory that defines the meaning and extent of tourist experiences, although a number of authors have made attempts to formulate models by generalizing and aggregating information’ (Chhetri, Arrowsmith, & Jackson, 2004, p. 34). Building on the work of Clawson & Knetsch (1966), Cutler & Carmichael (2010) explain the reason for this confusion to lie in the conceptual focus on the experience at the destination, and the failure to understand that the experience of a tourism act begins before the trip and, most importantly, continues long after the trip has ended through the recollection and communication processes.

2.2.2 Working Definition for Visitor Experience

While taking all these aspects into consideration, the current study understands visitor experience as ‘*inherently intersubjective and visual practices*’ which ‘*emerge through a fusion of collective and individual, staged and immanent, imaginings and experiential performances in a fluid negotiation of landscape*’ (Wylie, 2003, cited in Scarles 2009, p. 468). This definition is employed because it allows for a dyadic conceptualization of experience as composed of a phenomenological and a semiotic aspect. Linked to this, it invites the investigation of individual and collective meaning-

making processes; aspects of memory, narratives, and identity; and the link between the material and the immaterial in the process of place construction.

2.2.3 The Phenomenological Aspect: Experience as Memory Process

The phenomenological aspect of experience adopted by the present research sees tourist experience as a function of individual psychological processes, more specifically memory processes, and defines it as a past personal event strong enough to have entered long-term memory (Larsen, 2007). This understanding is based on Larsen's (2007) proposal that the tourist experience cannot and should not be considered as the interaction of the tourist with the tourism system in itself, although certain aspects of this interaction contribute to the construction of the tourist experience. Although arguing for the centrality of psychological processes in the development of tourist experience, Larsen (2007) does admit that, due to its multidisciplinary nature, psychology is only one of the viable options for researching tourist behavior and that certain studies may indeed have very legitimate reasons and aims for employing other approaches. Overall, he delves into the fields of tourism and psychology to conclude that '*tourist experiences are functions of memory processes*' (Larsen, 2007, p. 15). Moreover, to trigger meaning, experiences stored in the forms of stories and memories have to be interpreted and retold as narrated representations (Geertz, 1986). In this regard, Geertz (1986) defines experience as a type of behavioral hermeneutics which allows actions to be articulated and interpreted by individuals. An important aspect to keep in mind is that narratives exist in a continuous process of change as individuals transcend their personal experiences and delve into expressions which are

imbued with social and cultural meanings (Bruner, 1986). Ultimately, ‘even though experience is a generically individual activity, where each individual has to work out her own impressions, it is only when an experience is shared that it obtains texture and meaning’ (Bruner, 1986, cited in Selstad, 2007, p. 30). Different aspects of memory, narratives, and the intimate connection between these two notions and the tourism field are discussed at later stages of the current study.

2.2.4 The Semiotic Aspect: Experience as Signs and Symbols

The semiotic aspect of experience employed by the current study acknowledges that the materiality of heritage sites is rich in narrative texts and deeply imbued in meaning, which turns the tourism experience at heritage sites into an exercise in semiotics (MacCannell, 1999; Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007; Metro-Roland, 2009). For semioticians, any meaningful symbolism, any sign system is viewed as a text to be read, from language to calligraphy, from paintings to sculptures, from performances such as socio-cultural rituals to symbolic places such as museums and memorials (Brockmeier, 2001). As Deely states: ‘*the whole of our experience, from its most primitive origins in sensation to its most refined achievements of understanding, is a network or web of sign relations*’ (1990, p. 13). Such an approach to tourism stems from Urry’s understanding of the ‘tourist industry’ as built around the production of symbols to be gazed upon (1990, p. 101), where the tourist experience is ‘to see named scenes through a frame’ (1990, p. 100), which transforms it into a ‘signposted experience’ (1995, p. 139). However, Urry’s understanding depicts the tourist as a passive receiver of signs and the meaning-making

process as rather static and random (Larsen & Mossberg, 2007; Metro-Roland, 2009). Rather, studies have revealed visitors be active participants in the attribution of meaning at sites of death and suffering, either by accepting, negotiating, or rejecting the interpretation on display (Light, 2017). Different aspects of identitarian co-construction are thoroughly discussed in other sections of this study. From this perspective, MacCannell's (1976) suggestion of experience as representing a transformation of the subject through involvement with external stimuli is seen as more appropriate than Urry's (1990). MacCannell emphasizes that experiences are external representations which arise when meaning-infused material entities, for example, museums or memorials, change individuals' emotions or thoughts (Larsen & Mossberg, 2007). Although still a rather passive understanding, this definition manages to touch upon the '*inescapable hybridity of >>human<< and >>nonhuman<< worlds*' (Thrift, 1996, cited in Haldrup & Larsen's, 2006, p. 276), and take into consideration that the tourism academia can no longer evade the significance of materiality and objects for the tourist experience (Franklin, 2003; Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). The current study revolves around Haldrup & Larsen's (2006, p. 278) call for a 'material semiotics' to landscape 'in which material, social and cultural aspects of place sedimentation are integrated'. Nevertheless, Haldrup & Larsen's (2006, p. 277) are critical towards previous semiotic attempts focused on the tourist gaze for creating an artificial dualism between culture and materiality, producing a genuine 'social world', and ignoring the influence of materiality on the experiential process. The present research proposes this criticism be closely connected with the fact that a high majority of semiotic writings in tourism have adopted, explicitly or not, a Saussurean semiotic approach stemming from linguistics, which leads to an arbitrary association of meaning

between signified and signifier. Contrastingly, the Peircean semiotic theory of signs is perceived as a more valid and reliable approach to the investigation of tourist experience with a place of dark memories as it acknowledges the importance of cultural, social, and political fabrics in the meaning-making process. These aspects will be thoroughly discussed in the methodology section of the study.

2.2.5 Two Fundamental Experiential Concepts: Interpretation and Authenticity

Two interrelated concepts often linked to experience throughout the tourism research are interpretation and authenticity. Relevant aspects for both concepts are discussed below.

2.2.5.1 Interpretation

Interpretation is a crucial component of visitor experiences at historic attractions and influences the satisfaction derived from a visit (Moscardo, 1996; Ashworth, 1998; Goulding, 1999; Moscardo & Ballantyne, 2008). For Wallin (1991, cited in Nuryanti, 1997), interpretation is the helping of a visitor to feel something that the interpreter feels, a sense of wonder, a desire to know. Alderson & Low (1996) see it as a planned effort to make the visitor of heritage sites understand the history and importance of the people, events, and objects with which the site is associated. The Society for Interpreting Britain's Heritage defines interpretation as 'the process of communicating to people the significance of a place or object so that they enjoy it more, understand their heritage and

environment better, and develop a positive attitude toward conservation’ (cited in Moscardo, 1999, p. 8). Moscardo, Woods, & Saltzer (2004) also understand interpretation as an educational tool for offering visitors enough information in nature-based tourism. Similarly, Moscardo & Ballantyne’s (2008, p.239) define interpretation as ‘a set of information-focused communication activities, designed to facilitate a rewarding visitor experience’. Although highly informative, these definitions depict interpretation as a one-way communicational practice directed by the authorities at visitors usually according to certain educational goals. They fail to take into consideration the importance of the audience - and especially their past experiences, and socio-cultural and political backgrounds - in the interpretative process. This trend is confirmed by Light’s (2017) critical review of dark tourism literature during 1996-2016. Even when presenting authorities’ view – Light (2017, p. 283) argues building on the work of Tribe (1997) – ‘[t]his form of knowledge is produced outside the academy and is not communicated through academic journals’. Moreover, Light (2017) exposes a reluctance among many researchers to engage directly with both the visitors and the professionals responsible for managing sites of death and suffering. The current study builds on these identified gaps to investigate the meaning-making processes for diverse stakeholders in the identitarian construction of the Sighet Memorial Museum within the developed framework of collective memory.

Fundamentally linked to memory and narratives, the current study adopts Kotler’s (1984, cited in Poria, Biran, & Reichel, 2009, p.93) definition of interpretation as ‘*the process of the transmission of knowledge, its diffusion, and its reception and perception by the individual*’. Similarly, Tilden (1977, p. 8-9) defines it as ‘an educational activity

which aims to reveal meanings and relationships’, and as ‘revelation based upon information’, while asserting that interpretation must connect its place or topic ‘to something within the personality or experience of the visitors’. The current study embraces Kotler’s and Tilden’s convergent definitions because they perceive the interpretive process as an interplay between the authorities providing knowledge and the audience (re)creating knowledge based on their subjective backgrounds. ‘The visitor ultimately is seeing things through his own eyes, not those of the interpreter’, and he is always translating and interpreting the received information ‘as best he can into whatever he can refer to his intimate knowledge and experience’ (Tilden, 1977, p. 14). Such conceptualizations also manage to touch upon the subjective and emotional aspects of heritage sites. These aspects are most clearly present in the interpretation of hot topics and dark tourism places (Moscardo & Ballantyne, 2008), as conflicts between people are always emotional affairs (Uzzell & Ballantyne, 1998). This argument is based on Uzzell & Ballantyne’s (1998, p.154) notion of ‘hot interpretation’, defined as ‘interpretation that appreciates the need for and injects an affective component into its subject matter’. Acknowledging the importance of this emotional element is vital in satisfying the emotional needs of visitors, in enabling people to confront or contemplate death, in making sense of tragedy or atrocity, in remembering loved ones, or in maintaining the dignity of those people that the site commemorates (Uzzell & Ballantyne, 1998; Sharpley & Stone, 2009).

2.2.5.2 Authenticity

One notion often argued as fundamentally important in the interpretation of dark heritage sites is authenticity (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Waitt, 2000; Wiles, 2007). This concept has constantly fascinated the tourism academia for several decades (e.g. Berman, 1970; Turner & Manning, 1988; Crang, 1996; Wang, 1999; Pons, 2003; Knudsen & Waade, 2010; Di Betta, 2014). Some contemporary tourism scholars agree with MacCannell's (1973) view that tourism, by turning culture into a commodity, has replaced real with 'staged' authenticity (e.g. Boorstin, 1964; Dovey, 1985). However, more recent work questions this objective conception and increasingly regards authenticity as a relative and socially constructed concept (e.g. Cohen, 1988; Wood, 1993; Xie, 2003; Xie & Wall, 2002; McIntosh & Johnson, 2005). The present study adopts this interpretivist approach and agrees with the following definition: *'Authenticity is a projection of tourists' own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images, and consciousness onto toured objects, particularly onto toured Others'* (Wang, 1999, p. 355). This projection is deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and political values shared by the members of the tourist-sending society (Culler, 1981; Bruner, 1991). It is an 'experiential' authenticity in which 'individuals feel themselves to be in touch with a >>real<< world and with their >>real<< selves' (Handler & Saxton, 1988, p. 242). The current research shares Steiner & Reisinger's (2006) understanding of existential authenticity in tourism not as the consumption of the real or genuine, but as personal and individual experiences which contribute to one's sense of identity and connectedness with the world.

2.3 Memory: A Bridge Between Individual and Collective

One feature dark heritage sites seem to share is that they are imbued with strong and often contested memories. Memory has been a preferred subject among scholars since ancient times. One aspect which has sparked up intense debates across decades is the conceptualization of memory as either individual or collective (Olick & Robbins, 1998). The current study adopts a bridging point between these extreme views and revolves around Winter & Sivan's (1999, p. 24) fundamental argument: '*memory does not exist outside of individuals, but it is never individual in character*'. What follows below in an in-depth discussion on the history of memory, and the individual and collective aspects of remembering. Having already argued that a holistic understanding of the tourist experience at dark heritage sites can be obtained from the dyadic exploratory approach – phenomenological and semiotic – the current section emphasizes the phenomenological component to be rooted in autobiographical memory, and the semiotic component to be based on shared signs and symbols stemming from a framework of transgenerational cultural, social, and political memory. One such framework transgenerational memory conceptualized in the present research is Romanianness. In turn, Romanianness is based on Romanian Common Knowledge defined as a function of four aspects: archaic thought, Orthodox Christianity, Communist mentality, and post-1989 globalizing perspectives.

2.3.1 A History of Memory: From 'The Art of Memory' to 'Les Lieux de Mémoire'

One of the constant subjects of interest among scholars, memory has been approached from different disciplines, including neurobiology, history, sociology,

narrative psychology, anthropology, literary criticism, art history, or political science. It has been understood broadly as ‘the connective structure of societies’ (Assmann, 1992, cited in Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 105), or narrowly as a subcategory of the sociology of knowledge (Swidler & Ardit, 1994). Social thinkers’ interest in memory can be traced back to the ancient Babylonian, Greek and Roman times (Yates, 1966; Coleman, 1992; Le Goff, 1992). ‘Memory is the scribe of the soul’ proposes Aristotle (cited in Wood, 1899), while Marcus Tullius Cicero agrees that ‘memory is the treasury and guardian of all things’ (cited in Brown, 1894). Nevertheless, a comprehensive study by Olick & Robbins (1998) into the lineages of memory reveals that it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that a distinctively social perspective was offered to a previously general and abstract notion. In trying to understand and explain the rising interest in the social aspect of memory especially during the last three decades, scholars such as Nora (1989, 1992), Le Goff (1992), Hutton (1993), and Huyssen (1995) agree that a ‘history of memory’ is needed. The rationale behind this approach is that ‘...memory has too often become another analytical category to impose on the past; the point should be to rehistoricize memory and see how it is so inextricably part of the past’ (Matsuda, 1996, p. 16). The current section of the study builds on the structure of Olick & Robbins’s (1998) comprehensive review of studies in the history of memory.

For any academic ventures into the realms of the history of memory, the works of Yates (1966), Coleman (1992), and Carruthers (1992) are indispensable points of departure. In particular, Yates’ (1966) *The Art of Memory* is a fundamental stepping stone. Influenced by the thought of sixteenth-century Neapolitan philosopher Giordano Bruno, Yates became intrigued with the revival of *ars memoria* during the Renaissance, when

one would expect the spread of the printed press to render it obsolete. In Yates' seminal work, *ars memoria* is understood as the rhetorical art of mnemonics consisting of memorizing through arrangements of places and images. More precisely, the architectural design of places contains the knowledge to be remembered and, in turn, this knowledge deeply embeds the place in the mind of the mnemonist. Thus, the architecture of place, whose particular character is given by the selected images with which it is adorned - offers it an aura of sacrality by connecting the place and the mnemonist into an intimate and intuitive familiarity (Hutton, 1993). In her investigation, Yates traces mnemonics from its simple origins in the sophist rhetoric of Greece in the fifth century B.C. to its ethical complexities in the High Middle Ages, and sophisticated transformation in the hermetic cosmology of the Renaissance (Hutton, 1993). She concludes that, while the techniques of *ars memoria* are unchanged across the analyzed 2,000 years, what has changed is the purposes for which art is used. Similar conclusions were drawn by Coleman (1992) in her exhaustive history of theories of memory from antiquity to medieval times. Particularly, she examines how medieval readers examined the construction of ancient texts as evidence of the past to find some reflection of how it felt to exist within the ancient world. The study confirms both significant continuities and great differences between ancient medieval and modern theories, noting the sophistication of medieval theories regarding narrative reconstruction. Although acknowledging the importance of Yates' study, Carruthers (1992) identifies a major gap in the ongoing debate on the orality and textuality of medieval literary theory: the largely ignored aspect of trained memory. She identifies memory as the faculty most closely linked to writing and composition in classical and medieval studies, and defines medieval cultures as 'fundamentally memorial, to the

degree that modern culture in the West is documentary' (Carruthers, 1992, p. 7). The author fundamentally perceives the memory of the medieval reader as trained memory – a practiced method for filling in the interior spaces of memory through a system of spatial and visual mnemonic designs that is closely resembling the memory systems of the manuscript page, the book, and the library. Thus, according to the author, medieval culture largely employed visual images in the storing of orally transmitted discourse, but still heavily relied on memorization and oral transmission (Carruthers, 1992). These three studies have been criticized for being too narrowly focused on the societal elite at the expense of popular memory (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Geary (1996, p. 28) fills this gap by attempting to explore 'the complex process through which ordinary individuals order, understand, and retrieve all sorts of information that together provide the referential field within which to experience and evaluate their daily experiences and to prepare for the future'. In so doing, he vividly focuses on how eleventh-century ordinary people actively and consciously engaged in creating their past through the use of different forms of cultural memories which give authority and meaning to the present. 'Individuals and communities', Geary argues, 'copied, abridged, and revised archival records, liturgical texts, literary documents, doing so with reference to physical reminders from previous generations and a fluid oral tradition' (1996, p.8). While describing women praying for their dead, monks (re)creating their archives, scribes choosing which past royal families to applaud or to forget, the naming of children or the recording of visions, Geary (1996) separates from Yates (1966), Coleman (1992) and Carruthers (1992) by distinguishing both written and nonwritten means of preserving and transmitting the past. This is in line with Olick & Robbins' (1998) proposal that clarity in the understanding of the social basis

of the memory can be increased by tracing the historical shift of memory from the mind to external loci. To back this up, they quote the findings of Assmann (1992) according to which, even if the Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Jewish cultures all developed technical means for preserving the past – word, text, writing, and book – only the last two persisted as living traditions due to the entire weight of their cultural continuity resting on fundamental texts which had to be kept alive. Indeed, the broad shift from orality to literacy over millennia is argued to be rooted in the continuous development of the relations between memory and technologies of information. In the process, ‘memory’, as Hutton (1993, p. 16) argues, ‘first conceived as a repetition, is eventually reconceived as a recollection’.

In his synthesis, Le Goff (1992) identifies five distinct periods in the history of memory. The first involves the freedom and creativity which people without writing possess, in which memory practices are not greatly developed arts. The second period – from Prehistory to Antiquity – involves the shift from orality to writing, bringing along two important mnemonic practices: commemoration and documentary recording. The third one – the Middle Ages – is characterized by ‘the Christianization of memory and of mnemotechnology, the division of collective memory between a circular liturgical memory and a lay memory little influenced by chronology, the development of the memory of the dead and especially of dead saints...’ (Le Goff, 1992, p. 68). In the fourth period – from the Renaissance to the beginning of the twentieth century – the development of the printing press added to the exteriorization of individual memory and the growth of collective memory to the point of the individual not being able to assimilate it in. The Romantic period of the nineteenth brought along the interest of nations to create shared

identities among their citizens, which reflects into a proliferation of means for commemorating, including coins, stamps, inscriptions, medals, or statuary. Lastly, the electronic means of storing and transmitting information developed in the fifth period – the twentieth century to present – changed both the way people remember and the way memory is conceptualized, an idea also shared by Thompson (1995).

Many scholars propose the nineteenth century to be a pivotal point in the history of memory for reasons such as increased industrialization and urbanization, the decline of traditional political authority and religious worldviews (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Also, the nineteenth century means a shift in the perception of the past from being immediately present to something which needs preservation and recovery (Ariès, 1974). In turn, this perceived disconnectedness between past and present leads to ‘social amnesia’ (Jacoby, 1975). Terdiman (1993) and Yerushalmi (2012) agree that memory becomes of vital importance in times when it has become harder and harder for people to relate to the past.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the works of two of art historians - Walter Benjamin and, mainly, Aby Warburg - are highly relevant to the current research. Although never explicitly mentioning the notions of collective or social memory, philosopher and art critic Walter Benjamin analyzes throughout his work, but especially in the unfinished *Arcades Project*, the material world as relations between accumulated culture and multifaced historicity (Buck-Morss, 1991). Similarly, the art historian Aby Warburg employs the concept of social memory (*soziales Gedächtnis*) to analyze artworks as repositories of primitive and ancient motifs across generations. The central idea behind his work is that all human creations are expressions of human memory

transmitted through collective memory of primeval beliefs, while the key to deciphering art and culture lies in tracing these shared symbols which continue to shape the world (Forster, 1976; Rampley, 1997; Confino, 1997). According to Warburg, two interweaving factors must be the center of attention of art historians. The first factor is 'the full spectrum of artifacts' in a given culture and the relationship both among themselves and to their surroundings (Forster, 1976). In attempting to explain this factor, Ginzburg (1986, p. 21) employs an analogy between the work of art and the needs or present life: to interpret it, individuals need 'to reconstruct the connection between artistic representations and the social experiences, taste, and mentality of a specific society'. The second factor proposed by Warburg is the distinctiveness of each work of art. In so doing, Warburg attempts to achieve a coherent balance between the perceived specificity of an artwork and its relationship with the surrounding culture. Thus, he rejects the arbitrary selection of evidence by art historians who propose the autonomy of aesthetic values for disconnecting the individual artwork from the larger politics and society (Confino, 1997). He also discards the selection of evidence by advocates of the formalist approach for adopting a very narrow perspective when interpreting the symbols and meanings of art (Confino, 1997). Contrastingly, what lies at the heart of Warburg's art historical method is the theory of response which revolves around the importance of social mediation of images. This theory acknowledges that a work of art – in fact, any representation of memory - cannot speak for itself, and calls for an investigation of those dominant customs, values, and traditions which connect and mediate the artistic representation with the historical circumstances (Confino, 1997). Confino (1997, p. 1391) warns that disregarding the wide and varied spectrum of symbols available in the society when interpreting a distinct

representation of the past (e.g. a museum, a film, a commemoration) leads to ‘symbolic isolation’. The current study adopts Confino’s (1997) view according to which the great potential of Warburg’s method to the study of memory lies in its ability to perceive society as a global entity, where different connecting parts – social, symbolic, political – and varied memories interact. ‘The critical issue’, Confino argues, ‘is not what is represented but how this representation has been interpreted and perceived’ (1997, p. 1392).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries also brought along a strengthened connection between nationalism and national memory, with the calendar being used by authorities as an essential symbolic instrument for breaking from the old regime (Ferguson, 1997), binding the nation to the ruling power (Cressy, 1989), and constraining their ability to remember different pasts (Zerubavel, 1985). Similarly, in his groundbreaking work on ‘imagined communities’, Anderson (1991) bases the rise of shared national identities and cultures among people who would never meet on the spread of print literacy, capitalist commerce, and the decline of religious worldviews. For Smith (1986), ethnic nationalism has become a substitute religion linking individuals to persisting communities through memories and identities in order to overcome the sense of futility arising from the removal of any vision of existence after death. This critical and political turn in the history of memory is also emphasized by Boyarin (1994, p. 15), who proposes statist ideologies to ‘involve a particularly potent manipulation of dimensionalities of space and time, invoking rhetorically fixed national identities to legitimate their monopoly on administrative control’. The fact that professional history is manipulated and exploited by national governments is further suggested by Breisbach (2007, p. 228) when stating that ‘historians were called on to mediate between the

demands for change and the equally strong desire to see the continuity of the past, present, and future preserved...Presented by careful scholars with great eloquence, these histories became popular possessions rather than scholarly curiosas'. In his influential contribution to Hobsbawm & Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm (1983, p. 268) is highly critical of political leaders who invent useful traditions in order to maintain legitimacy, more precisely of the 'mass politics, rulers and middle-class observers rediscovered [who] rediscovered the importance of 'irrational' elements in the maintenance of the social fabric and the social order'. Most of the powerful leaders across the nineteenth century employed means of mass-producing tradition, such as boosting the nationalist content of educational institutions (for example, the development of primary education imbued with revolutionary and republican principles during the French Third Republic); the expansion of public ceremonies (for example, Bastille Day), the production of public monuments (for example, the opulent Place de la République and Place de la Nation in Paris); the flag; the motto (for example, Liberté, égalité, fraternité), or the national anthem (eg. the Marseillaise). Their purpose is to construct an alternative 'civic religion' based on the collective perception of continuity with a suitable historic past (Hobsbawm, p. 269). Butterfield (1931) critically labels this approach to writing history as 'the Whig interpretation of history' aimed at glorifying the present.

It was in the early twentieth century that this preoccupation with memory transformed into a 'memory craze' (Megill, 1998, p. 38), a 'memory boom' (Winter, 2007, p. 363), a current 'obsession with memory' (Huyssen, 1995, p. 5), turning modern society into a 'generation of memory' (Winter, 2007, p. 363). The world has become a 'theater of memory' (Kenny, 1999, p. 422), which manifests itself through the

commodification of memory and the proliferation of monuments, memorials, museums, commemorative events and festivals, memory-based studies, visitations to historical sites, historical documentaries, war movies, and other forms of engagement with the past (Nora, 1989; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Berliner, 2005; Schwenkel, 2006; Beiner, 2008). This wide range of ‘media of memory’ (Kansteiner, 2002) exists through and, at the same time, sustains what Baxter refers to as the ‘business of memory’ (1999). In his groundbreaking book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur declares himself ‘troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and of forgetting’ (Ricoeur, 2004, p. xv). On a more positive note, Assmann (2010, p. 39) understands the memory boom as ‘a general desire to reclaim the past as an indispensable part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue and to reassess it as an important dimension of individual biographies and historical consciousness. It also provides a repository for group affinities, loyalties, and identity formations in a post-individualist age’. Researchers have proposed a wide range of reasons for this upsurge in memory. These include the imminent loss of the last remaining survivors of the Holocaust; the ‘democratization’ of the cult of the war dead after the World Wars, the Holocaust and Hiroshima; the recognition of the horrors of colonialism, racism, and environmental damage; the rehabilitation of neglected pasts; the developments of information technology and new media; the rapid demise of peasant culture in the developed world; the rise of multiculturalism; the reassessment of national identities in Europe; the inability of the historian to maintain monopoly over defining and presenting the past (compiled from Nora, 1989; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Klein, 2000; Berliner, 2005; Assmann, 2010;

Weedon & Jordan, 2012). Indeed, the tragedies of the twentieth century are recognized as having had a major importance in the perception of temporality and status of national memory. In the aftermath of these events, ‘the memory of the war was refashioned into a sacred experience which provided the nation with a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, place of worship, and a heritage to emulate’ (Mosse, 1990, p. 7). At the same time, the brutality of war and suffering produced ruptures in the fabrics of society, resulting in an abrupt decline of natural storytelling and an increase in material forms of memorialization (Benjamin, 1968). Another reason for this increased interest in memory is what Lowenthal (1975, p. 1-2) labels as ‘the deadly disease of nostalgia’ for which ‘no cure was found’. Modern times brought a shift in the perception of nostalgia from a vital disease to a generalized sense of loss engulfing folk from all social levels (Lowenthal, 1975). Building on the work of Alan Milward and Pierre Nora, Winter (2007) argues that this tendency is also the result of increased demographics, economic affluence and leisure time. Overall economic growth in Europe and the USA since the 1960s and the baby boom generation coming of age have dramatically expanded the interest in higher education, which in turn raised the demand for ‘memory products’. He presents an increase in the numbers of students enrolled in British universities from 118,000 in 1962 to 340,000 in 1990 (Winter, 2007). The trend appears to have continued, as a record number of 512,400 were accepted at UK universities in 2014, a 3.4% increase in enrollments despite tuition fees being tripled to £9,000 the year before (UCAS, 2014).

Although one might be tempted to believe that the intense preoccupation with memory reveals an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon, the reality is paradoxical. ‘The current obsession with memory’, Huyssen (1995, p. 6)

proposes, 'is not simply a function of the fin de siècle syndrome, another symptom of postmodern pastiche. Instead, it is a sign of the crisis of that structure of temporality that marked the age of modernity with its celebration of the new as utopian, as radically and irreducibly other'. He goes further in arguing the contemporary crisis of memory to represent an 'attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload' (Huyssen, p. 7). Similarly, Halbwachs (1992) declares the passing of memory into history as individuals lose a living relationship with the past.

In his major work on French places of memory, Nora drastically announces the 'fundamental collapse of memory' when stating that 'we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left' (1989, p. 7). According to him, the reason for this collapse lies in contemporary societies having separated themselves from the continuous past. 'Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past' (Nora, 1989, p. 8). Memory has been disconnected from the continuity of social reproduction and, consequently, societies are left with representing and (re)inventing what they can no longer spontaneously experience (Wood, 1994). As a result, Nora (1989, p. 7) announces the proliferation of '*lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because they are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory'. He goes on to argue that museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders are all *lieux*

de mémoire ‘where memory crystallizes and secrets itself’ (p. 7) ‘in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs’ (p. 19). For him, *lieux de mémoire* ‘are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it’ (Nora, 1989, p. 12). Because of the disappearance of *milieux de mémoire* in modern times, *lieux de mémoire* are developed to annihilate the destructive effects of the dictatorial history, and ‘to stop time, to block the work of forgetting’ (Nora, 1989, p. 19). ‘If we were able to live within memory’, Nora (1989, p. 8) argues, ‘we would not have needed to consecrate *lieux de mémoire* in its name. Each gesture, down to the most everyday, would be experienced as the ritual repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning. With the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history. We can think, for an example, of the Jews of the diaspora, bound in daily devotion to the rituals of tradition, who as >>peoples of memory<< found little use for historians until their forced exposure to the modern world’. Nora’s (1989, p. 7) object of longing – *les milieux de mémoire* – is embodied by the vanishing peasant culture which he perceives as the ‘quintessential repository of collective memory’ where ‘experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral’. Such societies ‘had long assured the transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values, whether through churches or schools, the family or the state’, and ‘prepared a smooth passage from the past to the future’ (Nora, 1989, p. 7). This was replaced by a society detached from organic memory and focused on organizing the past in the spirit of modernization, industrialization, democratization, and global mass culture (Nora, 1989). ‘What we take

to be flare-ups of memory', Nora (1989, p. 13) claims, 'are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history.' His entire thesis is based on a fundamental perception of an irrevocable conflicting rupture between memory and history. 'Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic-responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. Memory is blind to all but the group it binds-which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative' (Nora, 1989, p. 8-9).

Further considerations of the connection between memory and place follow in section 2.5.1 of the current study.

2.3.2 Individual (Autobiographical) Memory

Most of the knowledge on human memory capacity comes from the fields of neurological and cognitive psychology. According to Erll (2011), the beginnings of experimental psychology of memory can be traced back to Hermann Ebbinghaus' (1885) attempts to observe the mnemonic process in its 'pure form' by memorizing random syllables and measuring his own ability to retain them in his memory. Thus, in the initial stages of memory studies, the phenomenon was reduced to a simple 'storage and retrieval' model. A vital turn was brought by British psychologist Sir Frederic C. Bartlett's classic work *Remembering* (1932). By merging elements of social and experimental psychology, Bartlett (1932) argued that all cognitive processes must be understood as an 'effort after meaning' (p. 44) and that the act of remembering 'is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction' (p. 213). Fundamental to the current study is Bartlett's concept of 'schemata'. According to him, schemata are socially-acquired, culture-specific patterns and constructions of knowledge based on which assumptions regarding the nature of and relationships among specific people, objects, and situations can be made. To support his argument, Bartlett presents the results of an experiment which proves that, when asked to remember an unfamiliar story previously showed, participants recall it according to their culturally shaped understanding of what 'good' stories should be like. Erll (2011, p. 83) quotes Pethes & Ruchatz's (2001) assumption that '[schemata consists] of slots and

conditions governing what can occupy these slots (and thus, what can, according to the schema, be comprehended, perceived, remembered, or anticipated). Schemata thereby have an economic function for memory, as now not all the details have to be remembered; instead just the particular slots of the particular schema currently activated have to be concretely filled. [This way] schemata make it possible for various pieces of information to be *meaningfully* related to one another and organized'. In this way, Bartlett's work can be perceived as an important stepping stone towards the 'cognitive turn' in psychology, which understands humans not as information-storing, but as information-processing entities. This idea is further developed by Tulving (1983b) who argues that the process of remembering can be analyzed according to three successive stages: encoding, storage, and retrieval.

The cognitive psychology of memory acknowledges the existence and interplay of varied memory systems within the human brain (Schacter, 1996; Tulving, 2000). Two of these systems function on subconscious, implicit or non-declarative levels. The first one, procedural memory, was brought into the spotlight in 1896 with Henri Bergson's concept of *mémoire habitude*. This type of memory includes stored body movements and skills which enable automatic actions without any conscious reflection. The second one, priming memory, is based on the higher probability that an individual will recognize a stimulus already unconsciously perceived at some earlier point (Erll, 2011). On the conscious, explicit or declarative levels two systems of memory operate independently of each other: semantic memory – not temporally situated, and containing *noesis* or learned, conceptual, symbolically represented knowledge; and episodic memory – tied to a specific time and context, and encompassing *autonoesis* memories of own life experience

(Tulving, 1983b; Schacter, 1996; Schacter, 2000). Tulving (1972, p. 386) defines semantic memory as ‘the memory necessary for the use of language. It is a mental thesaurus, organized knowledge a person possesses about words and other verbal symbols, their meaning and referents, about relations among them, and about rules, formulas, and algorithms for the manipulation of the symbols, concepts and relations’. On the other hand, when referring to episodic memory, Tulving (1983b, p. 124) describes it as ‘mental time travel’: ‘Remembering, for the rememberer, is mental time travel, a sort of reliving of something that happened in the past’. Scholars agree that the most specific feature of episodic remembering is the way it connects individuals to the particular past events which these memories are about (Campbell, 1997; Hoerl, 1999). In the same vein, Brewer (1996, p. 60) defines recollective episodic memory as a ‘reliving’ of an individual’s phenomenal experience from a particular moment in the past, accompanied by a belief that the recalled episode was personally experienced by the individual.

Clearly a form of episodic memory, autobiographical memory revolves around the narrativization of episodic memories to form life stories (Rubin, 1996; Fivush, 2008). As it connects one’s present self with own particular past experiences, it has naturally been the base of both philosophical and psychological theories. This function is the essence of John Locke’s 1690 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he proposes memory as the indispensable condition for individual identity, responsibility, and ability to communicate with others. Thus, one feature which distinguishes cognitive psychology in general and autobiographical memory in particular from the present-focused radical constructivism is the reliance on a conscious sense of the ‘extended self’ (Neisser, 1997), the significance of a ‘self in time’ (Nelson, 1989). However, not all everyday episodic

memories are retained and emplotted in the 'self-story' constructed as the backbone of each individual's identity (Randall, 1995). Others exist in a subconscious and latent form until triggered by some external stimulus and, followed by repetitions of similar events, become symbolically encoded and categorized into general knowledge structures for further conscious retrieval (Nelson, 2003; Assmann, 2011). This important feature of cognitive psychology is represented by the concept of 'ecphory' (Tulving, 1983a). Coined by Richard Semon in 1904, 'ecphory' is defined as 'a set of processes by which retrieval information provided by a cue is correlated with the information stored in the memory trace' (Tulving, 1983a, p. 361). Thus, the process of remembering depends on the existence of memory traces or 'engrams' which provide a certain continuity between experience and remembering (Tulving, 1982). As important to the mnemonic process are retrieval cues, which can be external cues, but also internal stimuli such as emotions, thoughts, or motivations (Tulving, 1982). Schacter explains the ecphoric process as a synthesis of stored information about past experiences (engram) and the conditions at the time of recall (retrieval cues): 'The cue combines with the engram to yield a new, emergent entity – the recollective experience of the remember – that differs from either of its constituents' (1996, p. 70). Furthermore, the process of meaning making depends on memory, as 'what is stored determines what retrieval cues are effective in providing access to what is stored' (Tulving & Thomson, 1973, p. 353). In this regard, close attention has to be paid to the paramount importance of how knowledge obtained in one's early developmental years influences his/her subsequent perception of life (Reese & Fivush, 2008; Reese, Jack, & White, 2010). Engel raises the significant issue of different versions of the past being modeled on the basis of the same engram according to the

contextual needs: ‘one creates the memory at the moment one needs it, rather than merely pulling out an intact item, image, or story’ (1999, p. 6). In turn, this is closely related to the controversial concept of false memory, where individuals might believe they are remembering when they are confabulating, or think they are creating something new when they are actually remembering it (Martin & Deutscher, 1966). Nowhere is the process of false memory more pressing than in the context of memories of traumatic experiences, whose extreme emotional intensity cannot be easily narrativized (Schacter, 1995). Suppression, dissociation from the past experience, or the involuntary and compulsive reproduction of fragments of memory are among the mechanisms of traumatic memory (Williams & Banyard, 1999). In addition to the sensitive problem of false memory, other general traits add to the slippery nature of episodic memories, four of which are depicted by Assmann (2010). Thus, episodic memories are: idiosyncratic and perspectival – never exchangeable nor transferable, necessarily bound to a specific case and limited to one perspective; fragmentary – individuals recall cut-out mnemonic bits and pieces which lack order or cohesion, unless memories are tied into a larger narrative which retrospectively provides them with meaning; transient, changing, and volatile – memories fade, recede into the background or vanish altogether with changes in individual value systems and social structures of relevance; continuously socially readapted – they never exist in complete isolation but are connected to and depend upon a wider network of memories and to the memories of others (Assmann, 2010). Similarly, Harvard psychologist Schacter developed a list of ‘seven sins of memory’ (1999). The first three sins are different aspects of forgetting (transience, absent-mindedness, blocking), the following three include types of distortion (misattribution, suggestibility, bias), while the seventh one (persistence)

involves intrusive recollections which are difficult to forget. These aspects add to the notorious poor view of human memory capacity among contemporary neurologists and cognitive psychologists while reinforcing Wittgenstein's statement that the difficulty with understanding memory lies in the fact that 'many very different things happen when we remember' (1974, p. 181). Nevertheless, human beings have to rely on memories because 'they are what makes human beings human' (Assmann, p. 212). As Schacter says: 'Memory is the scaffolding upon which all mental life is constructed' (1995, p. ix). Moreover, in relation to memory, there is never just a single or simple version of 'truth' and it may not be the only goal of remembering. In fact, exact recalls are rarely necessary for successful remembering (Rubin, 1995). Important support for this argument comes from the field of the phenomenology of remembering which proposes that truth in memory depends on transformations at the time of recollection. Rice & Rubin show how most people shift perspectives of ordinary and genuine autobiographical memories (2009). One can sometimes take 'the position of an onlooker or observer, looking at the situation from an external vantage point and seeing oneself 'from the outside'', while another can remember the same event or scene from one's own perspective, with approximately the line of sight available in the original situation (Nigro & Neisser, 1983, p. 467). Although arguably confusing in many respects, the existence of both 'observer' and 'field' points of view in individual memory confirms that a construction is compatible with veridical remembering, and does not threaten the common sense trust in the reliability of memory (Debus, 2007a, 2007b; Sutton, 2010).

Although the benefits of phenomenology towards the study of memory have been acknowledged (Casey, 2000; Ennen, 2003; Middleton & Brown, 2005), there is still a

paucity of research on how people retrospectively evaluate experiences with both pleasant and unpleasant aspects (Miron-Shatz, Stone, & Kahneman, 2009). This reveals that Tulving's 1989 warning according to which cognitive psychology studies have largely neglected the phenomenal experience of recollection is ever so present and valid. Considering its research actuality and emphasizing a vital gap the current study builds on, specific relevant ideas in Tulving's *Memory: Performance, Knowledge, and Experience* (1989) are worth bringing to the forefront. Tulving begins his investigation with James' (1890) definition of memory as the present conscious awareness of an event that has happened in the own past of the rememberer, a mnemonic process which possesses a certain subjectively experienced 'warmth and intimacy'. Thus, Tulving argues that the phenomenological experience of recollection has not only cognitive aspects but also affective ones. This is directly linked to the aforementioned concept of ecphoric information, understood as a type of knowledge of one's past events as experienced and understood by the rememberer at the time of happening, and as affected by subsequent events or conditions of recollection. The biological relevance of knowledge carried by recollective experience lies in its ability to influence the individual's decision-making process and future behavior. Surprisingly, according to Tulving, psychologists involved in the study of memory have mostly focused on the amount of recall, the accuracy of recognition, and the latency of response, while ignoring the recollective aspect of memory as 'the conscious re-experiencing of earlier experiences' (p. 4). Tulving emphasizes this contradiction when stating that 'recollection is a 'pure' mental phenomenon, conscious awareness of past experiences is the essence of memory, and yet psychologists and other scientists who have been studying memory for over a hundred years have paid scant

attention to recollection as a phenomenon of consciousness' (p. 5). He goes on to propose two plausible reasons for this scarcity of empirical work in the realm of recollective experience: the lack of suitable methodology, and the tacit acceptance of what he calls the 'doctrine of concordance' which implies a harmonious connection between behavior, knowledge, and experience (p. 8). Accordingly, the current study adopts and builds on Tulving's recommendation that further research should be open for 'more direct, empirical approaches to the study of conscious experience in memory, and to the study of the relations between such experience and other aspects of memory' (p. 10). Having acknowledged different types of memory which function on the level of individual memory, and the need for phenomenological approaches to autobiographical memory, the paper turns to the investigation of other aspects of memory which significantly influence the mnemonic experience.

2.3.3 Aspects of Collective Remembering

Building on the work of Halbwachs (1992), Zerubavel (1996), Confino (1997) and Assmann (2010), one underlying assumption of the current study is that memory includes much more than what individuals experience directly. As Winter & Sivan (1999, p. 24) state: *'memory does not exist outside of individuals, but it is never individual in character'*. It is also acquired via interacting, communicating, sharing, learning, participating, and negotiating and is always influenced by the full spectrum of symbolic representations available in a given culture. Thus, memories are meaning constructions semiotically intertwined with broad 'cultural texts' and discursively negotiated within

‘symbolic spaces’ (Brockmeier, 2010, p. 13). Also, a major task of collective memory is to serve the specific and usually conflicting interests of the group in the present (Schwartz, 1982). Based on this, it is argued that to understand the processes, practices, and outcomes of collective remembering, one must take into account the social, cultural, historical and political characteristics of the community in which a significant event occurred and where the remembering takes place (Bakhurst, 2005). More precisely, understanding it revolves around investigating ‘the symbols, codes, artifacts, rites, and sites in which memory is embodied and objectified; the coherence or fragmentation of the narratives, rituals, geographies, or even epistemologies it relies upon; and the way their authority changes over time’ (Lambeck & Antze, 1996, p. xvii).

2.3.3.1 The Social Aspect of Memory

‘Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god’, proclaimed the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in what ultimately became one of the most famous quotes of Western philosophy. His words have become a universal statement of the fact that human beings do not only live in the first-person singular but also in various forms of the first-person plural whose ‘social frames’ of shared values, anxieties, experiences, and narratives they adopt (Assmann, 2010, p. 37). Communities are constituted by their past and, in this regard, a real community is a ‘community of

memory’, one that does not forget its past (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 153). As Hobsbawm (1972, p. 3) states: ‘To be a member of any human community is to situate oneself with regard to one’s (its) past, if only by rejecting it’.

Although no agreement exists within or across disciplines on the definition of collective memory, scholars seem to agree on the social nature of such memory and its shareability among members of a community or social group, be it a family, a neighbourhood, an institution, a nation or a generation (Schwartz, 1982; Zerubavel, 1996; Wilson, 2005; Harris, Paterson, & Kemp, 2008; Reese & Fivush, 2008). *‘Every memory, as personal as it may be - even of events that are private and strictly personal and have not been shared with anyone - exists through its relation with what has been shared with others: language, idiom, events, and everything that shapes the society of which individuals are a part’* (Íñiguez, Valencia, & Vázquez, 1997, p. 250).

In fact, individuals are continuously immersed in lifeworlds of memory from a developmentally early stage, with the narrative environment of the family playing a pivotal role in mediating children’s acquisition of culturally suitable means of thinking, feeling, remembering and behaving (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002). These parent-child narrative practices demonstrate the continuum between individual and social memories and structure memory for personally meaningful experiences (Nelson, 1993, 1996; Brockmeier, 2002, 2010).

Social memory is defined as ‘the means by which information is transmitted among individuals and groups and from one generation to another. Not necessarily aware that they are doing so, individuals pass on their behaviors and attitudes to others in various

contexts but especially through emotional and practical ties and in relationships among generations' (Crumley, 2002, p. 39). Compared with previous definitions focused on the oral and written transmission of information (e.g. Goody, 1986; Tonkin, 1992), Crumley's definition encompasses verbal and non-verbal, intentional and unintentional practices for diffusion of transgenerational knowledge. Framed by a specific geographic context, community perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, values, and institutions are communicated among generations and set the parameters by which social change and spatial transformation are evaluated (Takei, 1998; Crumley, 2002). Thus, memory is social because recalling past events, retrieving information, acquiring knowledge, and judgment frequently occur through social interaction (Larson & Christensen, 1993; Wittenbaum, 2003; Harris, Paterson, & Kemp, 2008). 'It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (Halbwachs 1992, p. 38), and they do this 'collectively, publicly and interactively' (Schudson, 1995, p. 360) in a 'reciprocal process of co-construction' (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000, p. 951). In the same line, Zerubavel proposes the notion of 'mnemonic socialization' when stating that '>>recollections<< are only reinterpretations of the way they were originally experienced and remembered within the context of our family' (1996, p. 286). Scholars agree that each mnemonic community is regulated by certain mnemonic traditions and social dynamics of remembrance which determine and mediate what is to be remembered, how far back, how 'deep' and the particular tone in which to be recalled (Zerubavel, 1996; Hirst, Manier, & Apetroaia, 1997; Skowronski & Walker, 2004). This existential fusion of one's biography with the history of the groups he belongs to is an essential part of social

identity, which, in turn, maintains and nurtures what Nora (1989, p. 16) has called a ‘cult of continuity’.

2.3.3.2 The Cultural Aspect of Memory

Building on the work of Nietzsche, Assmann & Czaplicka (1995) state that humans must find a way of maintaining their nature consistently throughout generations and propose cultural memory as the solution. Culture is fundamentally related to memory through its ability to create a contact between the living, the dead, and the not yet living (Assmann, 2008). Lotman & Uspenskij (1984, p. 3) define culture as ‘the memory of a society that is not genetically transmitted’. Another definition of culture sees it as a domain ‘where meanings are negotiated, and relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested’ (Jackson, 1989, p. 3). In this regard, culture can be seen as both a system (values, schemata, scripts, models, metaphors, and artifacts) and a process (rituals, daily routines, and practices) of symbolic mediation (Harris, Paterson, & Kemp, 2008; Wang, 2008). Cultural memory revolves around fixed points in the past – transgenerational shared symbols which do not change with the passing of time (Confino, 1997; Assmann, 2008). These fixed points are fateful events of the past - real ‘islands of time’ - whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance), and whose meaning, when touched upon, may suddenly become accessible again across millennia (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 129). In this regard, a crucial feature of collective memory is its ability to ensure cultural continuity (Schwartz, 1982), which in turn helps to sustain and

reproduce the ‘imagined communities’ individuals identify with and that gives them a sense of history, place, and belonging (Anderson, 1981). In his seminal research into nationalism, Anderson refers to the nation as ‘*imagined*’ because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’, and ‘*community*’, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings’ (1981, p. 7). According to him, language plays a crucial role in ‘its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities’ (1991, p. 133). Anderson goes on to argue that language leads to the creation of symbols and history which enable people to ‘imagine’ nation, and this feeling of nationhood can be fostered within a centralized educational system.

Consciously or not, recollections and commemorations fit cultural scripts or knowledge structures, as individuals draw upon archetypal myths and follow specific narrative forms to produce meaning (Green, 2004; Reese & Fivush, 2008). In this line, cultural memory is defined as ‘a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation’ (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 126). It contains cultural messages addressed to posterity and intended for continuous re-use, which in turn help contextualize the memories of personally experienced events even long after they have occurred (Assmann, 2008; Reese & Fivush, 2008). Drawing upon

notions of Gestalt psychology, Borrett & Kwan (2008, p. 138) state that ‘In all of our immediate sensory-motor interactions with the world, our environment is composed of discrete objects but there is an omnipresent gestalt background of nonrepresentational cultural practices that confer meaning to these objects based on our experience’. Thus, cultural memory is perceived as a ‘working memory’ which revolves around continuous acts of selective recollection performed in a society and provides a common frame of reference for its members (Assmann, 1999). These cultural frames of reference were called ‘contexts of cultural participation’ (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997) or ‘memory schemata’ (Beim, 2007). Culturally and socially formed and rooted, schemata are ‘knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information’ (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269). Individuals remember events that are more culturally available, so it is argued that the comprehensiveness of a culture’s schemata limits the cultural meaning of memory by shaping the way individuals attend to, interpret, remember, and respond emotionally to the information they encounter and possess (DiMaggio, 1997; Beim, 2007). For example, in her trans-cultural study on collective memory, Wang (2008) spotted clear differences in memory practices between Asian (more precisely Confucian) and European American respondents based on cultural perceptions of self, past, time or death.

Essentially for the current study, Lotman (1990) perceives cultural memory as a semiotic universe which is comprised of all the sign and symbol systems of a culture, interacting among each other at a given point in history. This universe exists within the profoundly dialogical frame mentioned above, which Lotman (1988, p. 40) labels a

‘working semiotic system’. Thus, the social process of remembering is culturally mediated within a symbolic space formed of a variety of semiotic vehicles and devices ranging from oral and written language to memorials and memory practices (Brockmeier, 2001, 2002). The interdependency of memory and culture is noted by Lotman (1988, p. 40) who states: ‘Powerful, external, textual incursions into a culture, seen as one grand text, not only lead to the adaptation of external messages and the entry of those messages into the memory of a culture but also serve as stimuli for the self-development of that memory, the results of which are unpredictable’. In this regards, Wertsch (1985, 2002) perceives humans as sign-using animals and semiotic mediation as the key to avoiding the pitfalls of a strong version of collective memory.

2.3.3.3 The Political Aspect of Memory

Smith (1996a, p. 383) argues that ‘one might almost say: no memory, no identity, no identity, no nation’. As Gong (2001, p. 26) says, ‘transferring from generation to generation, history and memory issues tell grandparents and grandchildren who they are, give countries national identity, and channel the values and purposes that chart the future in the name of the past’. Although depicting the political nature of collective memory, these statements fail to take into consideration the complexity and interactivity of the phenomenon. Scholars agree that public memory stems from a continuous and dynamic political process of negotiating narratives among different groups in the geographical and socio-cultural sphere (Sturken, 1997; Till, 1999; Chang & Huang, 2005; Dwyer & Alderman, 2008; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2008; Zandberg, Meyers, &

Neiger, 2012). Moreover, collective recollections are selectively and systematically reconstructed with regard to the interests, needs and preoccupations of the present in order to shape the future (Halbwachs, 1992; Chang & Huang, 2005; Wang, 2008). Likewise, Bell (2006, p. 6) notes that ‘as identities are challenged, undermined, or possibly shattered, so memories are drawn on and reshaped to defend unity and coherence, to shore up a sense of self and community’.

It is often the case that a select elite – leaders, officials, academics – appropriate the memories of ordinary people and employ them towards boosting their dominance and legitimacy (Trouillot, 1995; Withers, 1996; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Chang & Huang, 2005). As Connerton (1989) puts it: ‘control of a society’s memory largely conditions the hierarchy of power’ (p. 1), while ‘the images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order’ (p. 3). In her study on the making of Israeli national tradition, Zerubavel (1995) notes the typical attempts of nationalist movements to gain political legitimacy by creating a master commemorative narrative which emphasizes a common past for its members. Smith (1986) proposes that ethnic, national, or religious identities are built on historical myths that define who is a group member, what it means to be a group member who the group’s enemies are. Indeed, nation-building is based on forging a country’s collective memory (Podeh, 2000). Thus, ‘memory is the great organizer of consciousness’ (Langer, 1953, cited in Lowenthal, 1975, p. 27), as it revolves around strategic undertakings of ‘forgetting to remember’ favourable aspects of the past (Devan & Heng, 1994, p. 23) and ‘remembering to forget’ undesirable ones (Tay & Goh, 2003, p. 20). Similarly, in his review of dark tourism literature for the period 1996-2016, Light (2017, p. 284) concludes that ‘[n]ation-states are often reluctant to remember a

particular historical period or event: indeed collective >>amnesia<< is as much a part of creating a national history as collective remembering'. Manipulating the past and the international perceptions of a country is also a powerful tool for attracting foreign investment (Bandelj, 2002).

Megill (1998, p. 40) argues that 'when identity is problematized, memory is valorized'. Podeh (2000) and Wang (2008) agree that the selection and organization of knowledge under a state education system constitutes a major instrument of particular classes and social groups for turning young people into loyal citizens and instilling a shared identity. For example, history textbooks are imbued with ethnocentric views, myths, stereotypes, and prejudices (Assmann, 2008; Wang, 2008), becoming real 'weapons of mass instruction' (Ingrao, 2009, p. 180). Nevertheless, it can be argued that nowhere is the nation-identity-memory nexus stronger than in situations involving conflict, war, and suffering. Volkan (1997, p. 48) identifies two interwoven elements in the development of group identity: a '*chosen trauma*' symbolizing 'this group's deepest threats and fears through feelings of hopelessness and victimization', and a '*chosen glory*' comprised of myths about a glorious future, often seen as a re-enactment of a glorious past. According to him, a group unconsciously incorporates the mental representation of the traumatic event into its identity and transmits its injured self and memory of ancestors' trauma across generations. Volkan (1997) goes on to argue that once a trauma becomes a chosen trauma, the historical truth about it does not matter anymore, as leaders evoke the memories of the chosen trauma and the chosen glory according to political agenda. This is similar with Zandberg, Meyers, & Neiger's (2012) notion of 'reversed memory' which

cultivates the continuity of past events into the present by commemorating the traumatic past while glorifying the present.

2.3.3.4 Working Definition for Framework of Transgenerational Memory

Drawing upon the theoretical concepts discussed above, the current study understands the collective aspect of remembering as *‘a social construction constituted through a multiplicity of circulating sign forms, with interpretations shared by some social actors and institutions and contested by others in response to heterogeneous positions in a hierarchical social field in which representations of the past are mediated through concerns of the present’* (French, 2012, p. 340). Such frameworks of transgenerational memory have previously been labeled Chineseness (Li, 2008), Hungarianness (Rickly-Boyd & Metro-Roland, 2010), or Britishness (Jacobson, 1997).

2.3.4 Romanianness and Romanian Common Knowledge

The framework of socio-political and cultural transgenerational memory the present research proposes is Romanianness and revolves around Romanian Common Knowledge.

2.3.4.1 Conceptualizing Romanianness and Romanian Common Knowledge

One of the objectives of the current paper is to conceptualize Romanianness. There is a severe lack of academic endeavors focused on Romanian collective psychology. In fact, only a handful of relevant studies have been published by now: Drăghicescu's *From the Psychology of the Romanian People* (*Din Psihologia Poporului Român*, 1907, reissued in 1996), Rădulescu-Motru's *Romanianness: The Catechism of a New Spirituality* (*Românismul: Catehismul Unei Noi Spiritualități*, 1936, reissued in 1996), and *The Romanian Ethnic* (*Etnicul Românesc*, 1942, reissued in 1996), Vulcănescu's *The Romanian Dimension of Existence* (*Dimensiunea Românească a Existenței*, 1943, reissued in 1991), Noica's *The Romanian Sentiment of Being* (*Sentimentul Românesc al Ființei*, 1978), and Ralea's *The Romanian Phenomenon* (*Fenomenul Românesc*, 1997). Although these studies are highly informative, the current paper understanding of Romanianness is slightly different and is built upon previous the conceptualization of Chineseness described below.

Borrowing Ogden's (1992) definition of Chineseness, Romanianness in the present research is understood as a mixture between a self-evident natural identity and a political articulation. A second element is adapted from Meerwald's view of Chineseness (2004, p. 1) and proposes Romanianness to be an expectation for a Romanian to perform certain socio-cultural practices according to specific 'cultural semantics'. A third aspect which builds on the two previously mentioned is brought from Li's (2008) definition of Chineseness and understands Romanianness as the capacity to access Romanian Common Knowledge, and it is this understanding of Romanianness that the current study employs.

Following in Li's (2008) footsteps, Romanian Common Knowledge is a common heritage of Romanian philosophies, religious concepts, history, literature, art, famous people, places and events, rituals and events shared by millions of Romanians. Continuously transmitted over decades or even centuries, this shared knowledge anchors each succeeding generation to the origins and beliefs of Romanian civilization. Still building on Li (2008), from a semiotic perspective, a Romanian heritage site is created when the Romanian Common Knowledge of the site is read through Romanian eyes. Directly linked to memory, the current paper proposes the archaic thought and lifestyle, the Orthodox Christianity, the Communist ideology and lifestyle, and the post-1989 thought and lifestyle to be the fundamental paradigms of the Romanian worldview. The fundamental assumptions of each of these four elements are presented below.

2.3.4.2 Archaic Thought and Lifestyle

The year 1938 can be seen as a landmark for describing the economic, political, social, and moral state of Romania before the Communism-imposing Soviet invasion. What characterised the Romanian society overall in 1938 was a genuine national consciousness, mostly developed by the significant historical events such as the 1859 Unification of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, the 1877 Independence War against the Ottoman Empire, and incorporation of Transylvania, Bukovina, and Bessarabia into what became known as Greater Romania (România Mare) in 1918 (Boldur-Lăteşcu, 2009). Most of the Romanian citizens – peasants, intellectuals, workers, rich or poor, young or old – were proud to be the descendants of the Dacians and Romans,

of rulers such as Stephen the Great, Mircea I of Wallachia, and Michael the Brave, and of the heroes of World War I (Boldur-Lătescu, 2009).

The 1938-Romanian was a genuine Christian believer, and figures of Christianity on Romanian soil can be traced back to the 3rd century, the times of the Dacians and Romans (Toma, 2008).

The primary purpose of the life of Romanians has always been owning at least a small parcel of land they can work and live off. The Romanians have perceived land as sacred (Ciauşanu, 2001). Land is the creation of God (Brill, 1994), the it 'feeds us and holds us, from the land we have food, from the land we have water, the land keeps us warm, the land is our mother' (*'pământul ne hrăneşte şi ne ţine, din pământ avem hrana, din pământ avem apă, pământul ne încălzeşte, pământul e mama noastră'*) (Niculiţă-Voronca, 2008, p. 123). It is also sacred because it is the resting place of ancestors and of those who sacrificed their lives to keep its integrity against invaders, but also of everyday Romanians (Olteanu, 2009). The entire cycle of life for Romanians happens on the symbolical and ritualistic coordinates of three existential pillars: the family, the land, and the faith (Bernea, 2005, 2006, 2009).

The educational system in Romania consolidated between 1862 and 1914 was based on a well-planned legislation (Toma, 2008). But it was the interwar period which saw the establishment of a modern educational and instructional system, mostly inspired by the French and Italian ones (Toma, 2008). It was a free and democratic system which allowed and supported the youth of modest families to develop and become active cultural personalities. Although modern, the educational process was a means of transferring

knowledge and experience between and across generations based on a strong respect for traditions and societal progress (Toma, 2008).

Having one of the longest histories in Europe, the Romanians transposed their centuries-old wisdom, and accumulated knowledge and experience into a vast array of superstitions, myths, and witty sayings (Ciașanu, 2001; Niculiță-Voronca, 2008; Olteanu, 2009).

2.3.4.3 Orthodox Christianity

According to the 2011 census, the vast majority of the Romanian population (86 percent) belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church (România Liberă, 2013). It is the second largest behind the Russian Orthodox Church, and its jurisdiction covers the territory of Romania, with additional dioceses for Romanians living in nearby Moldova, Serbia, and Hungary, as well as for diaspora communities in Central and Western Europe, North America, and Oceania. The Romanian Orthodox Church is an autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Church, in full communion with other Eastern Orthodox churches, but it is the only Eastern Orthodox Church using a Latin language. Christianity on Romanian territories can be traced back to the 3rd century AD, and still plays a highly influential role in the contemporaneous Romanian society. In a 2008 Eurobarometer charted by the European Commission, 31 percent of Romanians mentioned ‘Belief’ as the most important in relation to their idea of happiness (European Commission, 2008). In the Romanian language, it is known as *Ortodoxie*, a term which has its roots in Greek language and means ‘the correct belief’ (*‘Dreapta Credință’*).

The pillar of the Orthodox faith is the Holy Trinity (*Sfânta Treime*), which defines God (*Dumnezeu*) as three consubstantial expressions: Father (*Tatăl*), Son (*Fiul*), and Holy Spirit (*Sfântul Duh*). According to Christian belief, God's entire grace and work of creation are seen as a single operation typical to all three divine entities, where all things are 'from the Father', 'through the Son', and 'in the Holy Spirit'. The Father is the fountainhead of the Holy Trinity. From the Father, the Son is begotten before all ages and all time (Psalm 2:7; II Corinthians 11:31). It is from the Father that the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds (John 15:26). God the Father created all things through the Son, in the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1 and 2; John 1:3; Job 33:4), and people are called to worship Him (John 4:23). The Father loves humans and sent His Son to give them everlasting life (John 3:16). The Son – Jesus Christ - is eternally born of the Father. He became man, and thus He is at once fully God and fully man. His coming to earth was foretold in the Old Testament by the prophets. The Orthodox Church sees Jesus Christ as being at the heart of Christianity. In reciting the Nicene Creed, Orthodox Christians regularly reaffirm their faith in Jesus Christ: 'I believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father; by Whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end'. The Holy Spirit is one in essence with the Father. Orthodox Christians repeatedly

confess, 'And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified'. He is called the 'promise of the Father' (Acts 1:4), given by Christ as a gift to the Church, to empower the Church for service to God (Acts 1:8), to place God's love in peoples' hearts (Romans 5:5), and to impart spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12:7-13) and virtues (Galatians 5:22, 23) for Christian life and witnesses. Orthodox Christians believe in the biblical promise that the Holy Spirit is given through chrismation (anointing) at baptism (Acts 2:38). Other highly important concepts and aspects of Orthodox Christianity are presented below.

Creation (*Creația*) invites Orthodox Christians to confess God as Creator of heaven and earth (Genesis 1:1, the Nicene Creed). Creation did not just come into existence by itself, but entirely through God's work. 'By faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God' (Hebrews 11:3). Orthodox Christians do not believe the Bible to be a science textbook on creation, but rather to be God's revelation of Himself and His salvation. Orthodox Christians refuse to build an unnecessary and artificial wall between science and the Christian faith. Instead, they understand honest scientific investigation as a potential encouragement to faith, for all truth is from God.

Incarnation (*Încarnare*) refers to Jesus Christ coming 'in the flesh'. He is one divine Person, fully possessing the entirety of the divine nature from God the Father, and in His coming in the flesh fully possessing a human nature from the Virgin Mary. By His Incarnation, the Son forever possesses two natures in His one Person. The Son of God, limitless in His divine nature, voluntarily and willingly accepted limitation in His

humanity in which He experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue -- and ultimately, death. The Incarnation is indispensable to Christianity -- there is no Christianity without it. The Scriptures record, '...every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God' (I John 4:3). By His Incarnation, the Son of God redeemed human nature, a redemption made accessible to all who are joined to Him in His glorified humanity.

Sin (*Păcat*) literally means to 'miss the mark'. As St. Paul writes, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). People sin when they pervert what God has given them as good, falling short of His purposes for them. Peoples' sins separate them from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2), leaving them spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). To save people, the Son of God assumed their humanity, and, being without sin, 'He condemned sin in the flesh' (Romans 8:3). In His mercy, God forgives humans' sins when they confess them and turn from them. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (I John 1:9).

Communion (*Împărtășanie*) involves the open admission of known sins before God and man. It means literally 'to agree with' God concerning one's sins. St. James the Apostle admonishes people to confess their sins to God before the elders, or priests, as they are called today (James 5:16). People are also exhorted to confess their sins directly to God, through prayer (I John 1:9). Confession is one of the most significant means of repenting, and receiving assurance that even one's worst sins are truly forgiven. It is also one of the most powerful aids to forsaking and overcoming those sins.

Prayer to the Saints (*Rugăciunea către Sfinți*) is encouraged by the Orthodox Church. Physical death is not a defeat for a Christian, but a glorious passage into heaven. The Christian does not cease to be a part of the Church at death. The True Church is composed of all who are in Christ - in heaven and on earth. It is not limited in membership to those presently alive. Those in heaven with Christ are alive, in communion with God, worshipping God, doing their part in the body of Christ. They actively pray to God for all those in the Church - and perhaps, indeed, for the whole world (Ephesians 6:8; Revelation 8:3).

Salvation (*Mântuire*) is the divine gift through which men and women are delivered from sin and death, united to Christ, and brought into His eternal kingdom. In one of his sermons, St. Peter's was asked what people must do to be saved. He answered: 'Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). To repent means to turn from sin and to commit to Christ. To be baptized means to be born again by being joined into union with Christ. And to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit means to receive the Spirit who empowers one to enter a new life in Christ, to be nurtured in the Church, and to be conformed to God's image. Salvation demands faith in Jesus Christ. People cannot save themselves by their own good works. Salvation is an ongoing, life-long process of 'faith working through love'.

Heaven (*Rai*) is the place of God's throne, beyond time and space. It is the abode of God's angels, as well as of the saints who have passed from this life. Christians pray, 'Our Father, who art in heaven'. Though Christians live in this world, they belong to the

kingdom of heaven, and that kingdom is their true home. But heaven is not only for the future. Neither is it some distant place billions of light years away in a nebulous 'great beyond'. For the Orthodox, heaven is part of Christian life and worship. The very architecture of an Orthodox Church building is designed so that the building itself participates in the reality of heaven. The Eucharist is heavenly worship, heaven on earth. St. Paul teaches that people are raised up with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), 'fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Ephesians 2:19). At the end of the age, a new heaven and a new earth will be revealed (Revelation 21:1).

Hell (*Iad*) is understood by the Orthodox Church as a place of eternal torment for those who willfully reject the grace of God. The Father once said, 'If your hand makes you sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched - where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:44-45). He challenged the religious hypocrites with the question: 'How can you escape the condemnation of hell?' (Matthew 23:33). His answer is, 'God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved' (John 3:17). Christians believe there is a day of judgment coming, and there is a place of punishment for those who have hardened their hearts against God. The primary teaching is that it does make a difference how people choose to live this life.

2.3.4.4 Communist Thought and Lifestyle

One of the constant aims of the Communist regime in Romania, brought to the level of obsession under Nicolae Ceaușescu, was the creation of the New Man (*Omul Nou*), or what Aleksandr Zinoviev (1986) sarcastically called *Homo Sovieticus*. Developed in Stalin's era by the ideologists of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union such as Leon Trotsky and Anton Makarenko, the New Man was an archetype of a person with certain qualities that were said to be emerging as dominant among all citizens of a country, irrespective of its cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, creating a single people and nation (Ionescu, 2009). A considerable section of the 'Thesis for the 14th Congress of the Romanian Communist Party' deals with the need for 'establishing the ideological, political, and educational activities in order to create the New Man' (*punerea pe picioare a activităților ideologice, politice și educaționale menite să creeze Omul Nou*) (Ionescu, 2009). According to the Communist Party propaganda newspaper *Scînteia*, the New Man is obsessed with labor, in fact, 'labor is the laboratory in which the New Man is born' (*munca este chiar laboratorul în care Omul Nou ia formă*) (Ionescu, 2009). Another fundamental component of the New Man is the fanatically revolutionary one. According to official propaganda, the New Man exists according to the Communist ideal of acting according to an inflexible 'revolutionary spirit' (*spirit revoluționar*) and is a 'social innovator' (*inovator social*) who hates what is old and outdated. One of the 'relics of the past' (*relicvele trecutului*) the New Man hates the most is religious faith. He is an incurable atheist, immune to any form of 'mysticism and obscurantism' and educated in the spirit of 'dialectical materialism', in other words in the spirit of the Marxist philosophy (Ionescu, 2009). Official propaganda called religious faith

a psychological disorder which should be ‘carefully diagnosed’ (‘*diagnosticată cu grijă*’), or ‘a state of alteration of consciousness’ (‘*o stare de alterare a conștiinței*’) similar to dependencies, which requires special techniques for reintegrating its victims in the society (Ionescu, 2009).

A series of actions were aimed at constructing the New Man starting with a process of ‘re-educating’ Romanians (Boldur-Lățescu, 2009). It all started with the Soviet troops invading the Romanian territories and committing acts of murder, theft, rape, arson in August 1944. With them came a series of Moscow-imposed political and opportunist figures whose purpose was to boycott the national institutions by creating chaos in agriculture, transport, industry, commerce, police, and justice, which ultimately led to the installment of the Communist Groza government in March 1945.

The educational reform started on 3rd August 1948 according to the Soviet model has had catastrophic long-term consequences over the cultural state of the nation. Promoting the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, it purposefully brutalized the critical and analytical programs in school and universities, thus producing many generations of pseudo-intellectuals – the New Men - which became the new ruling class during the Communist regime (Boldur-Lățescu, 2009). In a totally-centralized system, the Communist Party used the radio, written press, cinema, and especially school to inform the citizens about the ‘enemy of the people’ (‘*dușmanii poporului*’) and call for hate towards the ‘class enemy’ (‘*inamicul de clasă*’) (Toma, 2008). The same means were used to inform the people about the advanced state of happiness of the Soviet nations, which was allegedly endangered by enemies who did not wish for the promised happiness and

who, therefore, should be arrested (Toma, 2008). A popular technique was the uninterrupted repeating of slogans through media, Party meetings, megalomaniac marches dedicated to the 'beloved leader', and, in schools, compulsory classes of 'political actualization' (*'actualizare politică'*) aimed at injecting the ideology in children's minds (Toma, 2008). Other methods, according to Toma (2008), were: arresting or transferring the educators with a 'reactionary' mentality (those who had studied abroad, who were dignified and not loyal to the Party); introducing unique study books translated from Russian language, focused on the Marxist-Leninist ideology and dialectical materialism, which promoted the Soviet science and culture as the most advanced in the world; pushing highschool graduates toward technical postgraduate school to support the forced industrialization of the country, while flooding the humanistic subjects with Marxism-Leninism; applying the principle of 'equal chances' which meant that 100 percent of students had to pass and graduate to maintain the image of a 'perfect' system and regime; applying positive discrimination toward children of 'healthy' origins (the 'working class') and toward young children for whom the 'revolution' was made, and negative discrimination toward children of 'unhealthy' origins (land owners, priests, officers, and, especially, political prisoners); creating special two-year schools which could replace the eight-year schools with the purpose of quickly creating loyal cadres; dissolving the Romanian Academy, imprisoning approximately 100 academics, and transforming it into a political institution; replacing 'useless' subjects such as foreign or classical languages, logics, or the history of religions, with subjects such as the history of the Communist Party or the Marxist-Leninist economy, politics, and philosophy; replacing Romanian literature with works promoting loyalty to the Party and instigating

to violent hate towards the 'class enemy'; banning, in 1949, approximately 8,000 titles from libraries and bookstores; and grossly falsifying national history in order to legitimize the Communist ruling. The purpose of such measures is clearly stated in the first article of the 1978 Educational Law in Romania, which reads: 'The educational system, as a main factor of culture and civilization, of educating the New Man, ensures the application of the Party and State policy toward forming the personnel for every economic and social activity on the basis of the newest conquests of science and technology, forming the socialist consciousness of the youth, forming a generation which is well prepared for work and life, devoted to the motherland, Party and people and to the cause of Socialism and Communism' (Toma, 2008). One of the most destructive effects of being exposed to long-term propaganda was the installment of a duplicitous way of thinking which led to a perverting of humans' capacity for rational and critical thinking (Toma, 2008).

During the Communist regime, fear was omnipresent. The magnitude of arrests, the establishment of the Communist secret militia called *Securitate*, the thick and widespread network of undercover agents and informants also contributed to the ever-increasing and generalized feeling of paranoia, duplicity, and mistrust (Toma, 2008). The forced collectivization of agricultural land between 1949-1962 also had disastrous effects on the everyday Romanian who, as mentioned, perceived land as sacred.

One experiment the Communists implemented toward creating the New Man was that of re-education through torture in what is nowadays known as the Pitești Experiment or the Pitești Phenomenon. Between 1949 and 1951, in the Pitești Prison took place the most terrible act of barbarism in the modern world (Solzhenitsyn, 1973). The treatment at

Pitești Prison was aimed at the dehumanization of the student elite, a generation which had been raised in a strong and dignified spirit of the love of God, nation, family, and traditions. 'In the so-called act of depersonalization, the students were forced, under torture, permanent and unimaginable torture, to betray all they held dear: God, their parents, brothers, sisters and friends. They were constrained to drink urine and to eat feces! The human being was thereby annihilated. Disgusted at his weakness, he would never be able to recover against his own conscience. The pain was beyond the power of human endurance' (Măgirescu, 1994, p. 6). The purpose was the re-education through physical and psychological torture, the transformation of the student elite – who had been respected and seen as role models by their peers – into atheists, informants on their families and friends, who were willing to apply the same treatment to others if needed by the Party. This transformation would mean the New Man had been created.

Measures such as the ones described above managed to produce a socio-cultural and moral rupture between generations which continues to affect the Romanian society. They abruptly broke the moral and historical fiber of the Romanian nation, and continue to do so as many of today's leaders of the nation were formed by the Communist regime. Quoting the Romanian writer Horia Roman Patapievici, Boldur-Lătescu (2009) emotionally mentions the features of the New Communist Man in Romania: 'sinister faces, sad eyes, stunned jaws, uglified faces, vulgar mouths, rudimentary features, unlettered and sickly speech [...] cowardness, perversity, vanity, selfishness, envy, remorseless delation, gossip', to which he adds the loss of national feelings, ethnic 'masochism', lack of solidarity and civic responsibility. Biologically, the New Romanian is weaker and less healthy than the interwar Romanian was (Boldur-Lătescu, 2009).

However, it is the behavioral and mental societal fibers which are still lacking moral landmarks and role models.

2.3.4.5 Post-1989 Thought and Lifestyle

In theory, the 1989 Revolution and the execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu brought the totalitarian Communist regime to an abrupt end. In practice, like other ex-Soviet states, the 1989 Revolution was actually a coup organized by some members of the Communist party with a more capitalist view who, in different ways, are still in power nowadays. In December 2017, the Military Prosecutor confirmed the hypothesis of a *coup d'état* by showing there was no power vacuum in 1989 (Andreiana, 2017; Pepine, 2017). This, for example, explains why, although the gross distortion of national history by the Communists is a widely known fact, not even one genuine history study book has been issued to date in order to teach the young generation a version of history closer to reality (Toma, 2008). After almost 50 years of constant terror, the Romanians are still sickened with fear and insecurity (Toma, 2008). Decades of intense propaganda indoctrination and extermination against the elites of the nation are reflected in the modern denigration of intellectual endeavors by the youth (Toma, 2008). The new leaders of Romania after 1989 – colloquially labeled crypto-communists – have changed the profile of the New Man with features brought in from democratic, liberalist, capitalist, and social-democratic doctrines (Boldur-Lățescu, 2009). ‘The New Man of Transition’ is a hybrid between an illegal businessman and a crypto-Communist, unscrupulous, greedy for overnight money-

making, and owner of a demagogical language which enables access to power through parliamentary democracy (Boldur-Lătescu, 2009).

One fundamental positive aspect brought about by the 1989 Revolution is the relatively unrestricted access to information and freedom of speech. The full inclusion of Romania among the members of the European Union in 2007 is another significant step towards breaking the impasse which has characterized the post-1989 Romanian society. The possibility of students to travel freely and study abroad is assumed to have a high potential for moving away from the Communist life view. Also, the access to external sources of funding and logistic support means that alternative educational and memorial projects can be developed with the purpose of providing a more realistic version of the Romanian history. Such a project is the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Romania.

2.4 Narrative: A Tale of Three Orders

As seen, dark heritage sites are imbued with strong and often contested memories which different stakeholders draw upon in their attribution of meaning. In other words, memories at places of death and suffering meaningfully materialize in the form of narratives. After presenting experiential aspects which transform the visitors into ‘storytelling animals’ (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 201), the study discusses Brockmeier’s (2002) three orders of narrative integration: linguistic, semiotic, and discursive.

2.4.1 The Visitors as Homo Narrans

Researchers agree that people's continuous need for meaning and understanding of life drives them to create stories (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Bruner, 1991, 2004; Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding, 2001), which they articulate and exchange during the process of storytelling with the purpose of interpreting and transmitting their experience (Polkinghorne, 1988; Chronis, 2012a). This fact fundamentally transforms individuals into 'storytelling animals' (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 201), or *homo narrans* (Fisher, 1984). Narratives are defined as cultural tools that mediate human communicative, cognitive and behavioral activities in various ways (Wertsch, 1998). Humans receive life in the form of narratives (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). 'It is through narrative we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes for the future' (Bruner, 2002, p. 64). Brockmeier (2002) proposes the fundamental potential of narrative to be twofold: its capability of playing different roles (cognitive, social, and emotive) at the same time, and its capacity to shape the temporal dimension of human experience by infusing the historicity of human existence with cultural meaning. This idea is shared by Carrithers (1991, p. 306) when stating that 'it is narrativity which allows humans to grasp a longer past and a more intricately conceived future, as well as a more variegated social environment'. Similarly, Yamada & Kato (2006, p. 265) propose that '[w]hat we experience in life is not identical to successive physical stimuli over time but is, instead, composed of organized meanings and constructed realities as life events and life stories. It is this >>narrated<< life that gives a consistent temporal structure to our experiences'. Fundamentally linked to memory, a discursively enacted narrative imagination is argued

to precede the incipient development of children's language (Nelson, 1996; Downing, 2003). Subsequently, the continuous process of meaning-making revolves around narrative practices which are culturally shaped and, in turn, shape the remembering culturally (Bruner, 1994; Wang & Brockmeier, 2002). Thus, the narrative fabric of autobiographical memory is important for providing the 'the structural glue that ties together the who, what, where, when, and why' (Nelson, 2007, p. 327).

2.4.2 Narrative as Linguistic Order

Narrative as a *linguistic order* is activated when the story of a site is being encapsulated into an intricate plot, with the scene, agent, action, intentionality, predicament, and solution being often described as the constituents of a narrative proper (Brockmeier, 2002). Viewed in this light, narrative is important because it allows for intricate constructions of temporality and spatiality to be developed, communicated and integrated into people's social life (Brockmeier, 1995). Narrative language is seen as the storehouse of transgenerational collective memory which provides historical continuity for a group (French, 2012). As Rickly-Boyd (2010, p. 261) states: '[narrative] is a construction that is not only ordered sequentially to highlight significant events but moves beyond the time frame of the individual life course to connect familial, national, and institutional narratives in an ongoing narrative construction of the self'. Closer to heritage tourism, narrative language is seen as having the power to create places and people-place bonds by providing visitors with metanarratives of national significance (Tuan, 1991; Stokowski, 2002; Rickly-Boyd, 2010).

2.4.3 Narrative as Semiotic Order

Deeply rooted in cultural memory, narrative as *semiotic order* refers to the fact that the physical installation of a site can be seen or read as a narrative text, while narrative texts, in turn, are laid out along storylines. Such an understanding sees a narrative as every text that tells a story, while a text is every meaningfully organized sign system (Brockmeier, 2002). Texts are seen as organic manifestations and constituents of the semiotic reality and cultural tradition of a social sphere (Randviir, 2002). Additionally, cultural narratives at heritage sites are carriers of collective memories among generations (Chronis, 2006). Consequently, narrative is fundamental in linking other forms of discourse and symbolic mediation, and integrating them into the symbolic space of a culture, while, at the same time, binding individuals to each other by allowing for a continuous flow of transgenerational shared memory which defines and frames the ever-changing coordinates for determining what is past, present and future (Brockmeier, 2001, 2002). From this perspective, the visitors' engagement with a site and its narratives semiotically triggers personal memories and meaningfully shapes the visiting experience (Rickly-Boyd, 2010).

2.4.4 Narrative as Performative or Discursive Order

Narrative as a *performative or discursive order* emphasizes that narrative, as a means of communication and symbolic mediation, is not only an outcome but also a process, a performance of meaning, a discourse (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001; Brockmeier, 2002). Accordingly, narratives are not natural phenomena waiting to be discovered by

humans, but, rather, they are human co-constructions (Cronon, 1992; Chronis, 2005, 2008, 2012a, 2012b). The narrative is the personalized expression of the narrator's own poetic aptitude and distinctive reading (Chronis, 2005), while the narrative text is created by selecting the appropriate events and means to be used, arranging them in a particular order, and linking them in a coherent and meaningful way (Onega & Landa, 1996; Chronis, 2008). However, narratives are conversations and the role of the listener/reader should also be taken into account (Robinson, 1981; Scott, 1994). The listener/reader is dynamically engaged in a dialogue with the text, thus filling the narrator's gaps, combining individual parts into a unified whole, and participating in meaning creation (Stern, 1989). Braid (1996, p. 6) understands this active involvement through the concept of 'following' that refers to the 'ongoing process in which the listener repeatedly tries to integrate the unfolding narrative and the dynamics of performance into a coherent and meaningful interpretation of what happened'. Narrative quality is fundamentally determined by narrative coherence (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Cronon (1992) proposes that a good narrative should have a coherent plot eliminates all the discontinuities, ellipses, and inconsistencies. Giving the example of a heritage museum, Chronis (2012a) suggests that the success of a narrative presentation in a tourism site also depends on visitors' active participation in the storytelling experience. Thus, heritage tourists can be viewed as story-builders who make an effort to connect the pieces, create personal relevance, and ascribe a new dimension to history by constructing coherent narrative accounts of what happened in the past, all of these to make their tourism experiences meaningful (Chronis, 2012a). One aspect to remember is that, since each visitor brings to a landscape different collateral information (Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007),

‘every space is interpreted differently by the different actors in it’ (Davis, 2001, p. 129). However, notwithstanding the subjectivity of interpretation, there are certain unspoken institutionalized commonalities in landscape readings among those commonly socialized by family, culture, and history, which, when entered into narrative discourse, are then shaped by power relations in an attempts to further homogenize meaning (Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007). The political implications of narratives are clearly emphasized by Alkon (2004, p. 148) who states that: ‘Peoples’ ideas about themselves and their daily lives [in a place] mediate specific political decisions’. Consequently, to understand the performative or discursive power of narrative, one must identify the way it is situated in the local social, cultural and political frameworks of transgenerational memory previously discussed.

2.5 Place Identity Construction at Places of Memory

Being an existential human phenomenon, traveling is unavoidably linked to place. In their perception, meaning-making, and consumption of (tourism) places, individuals engage with heritage by participating in narrative functions of linguistic, semiotic, and discursive orders. In so doing, they transpose memories into autobiographical narratives, which, in turn, develop one’s identity *with* place. However, the memories and meanings triggered by the individual’s interaction with a place are influenced by the site’s physical features, imbued with layers of transgenerational collective memories and official narratives which form the identity *of* place. The meeting point between the identity *with*

place and identity *of* place is where the construction of place and place identity happens, a process which is assumed to ensure the meaningfulness of visiting a site of dark heritage.

2.5.1 Places of Memory

The current study builds upon the discussion on Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* project in section 2.3.1 to further conceptualize the connection between memory and place. The universal activity shared among individuals when performing the past is that of anchoring their divergent memories, meanings and narratives in place (Dwyer, 2004; Till, 2004; Charlesworth, Stenning, Guzik, & Paszkowski, 2006). The close relationship between memory and landscape is well-established by a variety of multidisciplinary studies (e.g. Lowenthal, 1975; Till, 2003; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Legg, 2007; Lewicka, 2008; Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Bachelard (1994, p. 8) emphasizes the intimate connection between memory and places when mobilizing the Greek *topos* towards developing what he calls topoanalysis – 'the systematic psychological study of the localities of our intimate lives'. He argues the place situatedness of memory when arguing: 'Memories are motionless and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are' (Bachelard, 1994, p. 9). More precisely, but not exclusively, this link is depicted in work on memorials and monuments (Withers, 1996; Atkinson & Cosgrove, 1998; Till, 1999; Forest & Johnson, 2002), cultural landscapes (Matless, 1998), nostalgia (Blunt, 2003), the naming of public spaces (Azaryahu, 1996; Alderman, 2002a), 'ghost' landscapes (DeLyser, 1999), and the Holocaust and commemoration (Young, 1993; Charlesworth, 1994; Azaryahu, 2003).

Nevertheless, such studies seem to reinforce Pierre Nora's (1989) warning on the proliferation of material places of memory, a phenomenon which ultimately transformed into a business of remembering (Winter, 2008).

Researchers agree that memory and landscape are mutually constitutive of one another (Withers, 1996; Till, 2003; Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). On the one hand, personal and community histories and identities are intertwined with space and places, making meaning and memory association vital conditions in creating a sense of place (Tuan, 1977; Cresswell, 1996; Bell, 1997; Othman, Nishimura, & Kubota, 2013). On the other hand, an enduring collective memory revolves around the linkage of meaning with place (Nora, 1989; Koonz, 1994; Mitchell, 2003). Generally speaking, space becomes *place* when imbued with meaningful remembrance, while a sense of place arises from the physical, cognitive and emotional interaction with the site itself, events that occurred there, or the inhabitants of that particular space (Mowla, 2004). Such bonds between people and place are understood in the current study through the notion of place identity, and a thorough discussion of this concept follows at a later point of the paper. Within this framework of understanding, landscapes are theoretically understood as 'arenas of political discourse and action in which cultures are continuously reproduced and contested' (Graham, 1998, p. 21), where 'individuals and groups define themselves, [and] claim and challenge political authority' (Nash, 1999, p. 225). Boyer (1994, p. 321) calls such spaces 'rhetorical topoi' and defines them as 'those civic compositions that teach us about our national heritage and our public responsibilities and assume that the urban landscape itself is the emblematic embodiment of power and memory'.

As seen, sites of national heritage are powerful transgenerational repositories of memory and meanings, thus having an important educational function in the articulation of national identity (Cooke, 2000; Sidaway & Mayell, 2007). ‘As an inert piece of stone, the monument keeps its own past a tightly held secret, gesturing away from its own history to the events and meanings we bring to it in our visits’ (Young, 1993). This statement reflects the paradoxical nature of memorial places: groups strive at achieving temporal stability by projecting narratives about the past onto places while, at the same time, maintaining a continuous flux of ascribing new meanings and myths to the monument.

One common misconception is that memorials are imbued with an air of civic authority, familiarity, permanence and political impartiality (Johnson, 1995; Dwyer, 2004; Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Researchers base this on their location in public space, weighty presence, use of canonical media, and the enormous amounts of political and financial capital they require. Although perceived as frozen in time and meaning, memorials are in a constant process of becoming, according to contemporary events, interests, and tensions (Lowenthal, 1975; Mitchell, 2003). Moreover, Dwyer & Alderman (2008) warn that memorials hide as much as they reveal and bear traces of deeper stories about how they were created, by whom, and for what ideological purpose. Monuments and their subsequent narrative choices do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving but are designed and planned by those who have the time, resources and, most importantly, the state mandate to define the past (Dwyer, 2004). It is not uncommon for political regimes and elites to invest considerable amounts of time and money in the establishment and remaking of symbolic national landscapes to maintain social stability, accumulate political legitimacy and project mythic narratives of a distinctive national

identity (Johnson, 1995; De Soto, 1996; Foote, Tóth, & Árvay, 2002; Forest & Johnson, 2002). As Entrikin (1991, p. 11) notes, 'In mythical thought, necessary connections link events and their locations'. These connections are materialized in the form of spatial narratives, which involve a complex configuration of geographic elements including buildings, markers, memorials, and inscriptions carefully positioned to provide a spatial narrative of a historical event (Azaryahu, 2003; Azaryahu & Foote, 2008). One often employed means of narrating is historical chronology, which can be enacted by chronological progression from place to place along a route or trail with definite starting and ending points, or by showing sequential images such as before-and-after photographs or maps (Azaryahu & Foote, 2008). In places of strongly contested memories as the sites of dark heritage tend to be, thematic narratives are used to highlight and separate issues, timeframes, and standpoints while maintaining that they belong to the same historical theme (Azaryahu & Foote, 2008).

2.5.2 (Tourism) Place: A Dyadic Private - Public Understanding

Human beings are existentially and inextricably bound to a world of places (Relph, 1976; Tuan 1977; Low & Altman, 1992; Cresswell, 2015). This connection is summarized by Gabriel Marcel: 'An individual is not distinct from his place; he is that place' (cited in Relph, 1976, p. 43). Although most of the knowledge of place comes from the field of (human) geography, the concept is not a property of geography but one which travels freely between and across disciplines. In fact, place is proposed as the key term for interdisciplinary research in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first

century (Malpas, 2010). However, it is precisely this interdisciplinarity which creates the conceptual confusion, as reflected by the numerous attempts to define place. Relph (1976, p. 44) defines it as ‘a fundamental expression of man’s involvement in the world’, Paasi (1986, p. 113) as ‘a product of experience’, while for Samuels (1978, p. 30) ‘place is always an act of referencing, and >>places<< are nothing more or less than reference points in someone’s projections’. Gibson (1978, p. 138) argues that any attempt to define or conceptualize place is a waste of time because of its close connection to common sense: ‘any time we speak of geography we are already speaking of places’. Suvantola (2002) presumes Gibson’s unwillingness to define place to be based on the inability of any definition to engulf the intricate and multifaced nature of the spatial phenomenon. Adding to the difficulty of understanding places is the acknowledgment that ‘[p]laces occur at all levels of identity, my place, your place, street, community, town, county, region, country, and continent, but places never conform to tidy hierarchies of classification. They all overlap and interpenetrate one another and are wide open to a variety of interpretation’ (Donat, 1967, cited in Relph, 1976, p. 29). Nevertheless, what these definitions have in common is their understanding of place as space infused with meaning by human beings (Suvantola, 2002). In the same line, ‘the most straightforward and common definition of place’, Cresswell (2015, p. 12) proposes, is ‘a meaningful location’. Similarly, Low & Altman (1992, p. 5) say that place ‘refers to space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes’. In the same vein, the current study adopts an understanding of place as ‘*a focus where we experience the meaningful events of our existence*’ (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p. 19), or, similarly, as ‘*centre of meaning, or focus of intention and purpose*’ (Relph, 1976, p. 22).

As a fundamental existential aspect, travel is above all a spatial phenomenon (Minca, 2000). ‘Place experiences are integral to what tourism is about’, argues Squire (1994, p. 4), and her statement is backed up by Suvantola (2002). No matter what aspect of tourism one investigates (such as experience, impacts, motivations, identity, attachment, image, marketing, image, mobility, destination construction), or the scale of research (international, national, regional, destination, or site), the tourism act is unavoidably linked to place. The tourism academia tends to follow the general understanding of place as space infused with meaning. The present study adopts Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry’s (2004, p. 3) definition that *tourism space only becomes place when it is ‘appropriated, used and made part of the living memory and accumulated life narratives of people’*.

Place has been a central preoccupation among Western thinkers since at least the first century AD, and has found itself at the heart of discussions of philosophy, geography, art, architecture, anthropology, history, art, literature, and other disciplines (Feld & Basso, 1996; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Prieto, 2013 Cresswell, 2015). Although the first explicit philosophy of place appeared with the works of Plato and Aristotle, it was not until the twentieth century that place became once again a central topic of interest among philosophers, especially with Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1962). Suvantola (2002, p. 30) quotes Heidegger’s understanding of place as ‘that which places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality’. According to Cresswell (2015), Casey (1998) traces Heidegger’s thought to fundamentally embrace place as vital to the authentic human experience. The two intertwined key Heideggerian of *dasein* (or ‘being-in-the-world’) and

dwelling (or inhabitation) reflect a continuity between place and person rooted in a sense of nearness and affection (Cresswell, 2015). A thorough discussion of Heideggerian philosophical ideas relevant to the current study can be found under the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis section of the Methodology.

Two highly influential geographers whose work contributed immensely to the development of the idea of place are Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph. Tuan (1977, p. 6) advances the idea that places are ways of knowing the world through human perception and experience and defines space as an abstract entity, while place as space infused with meaning through human perception and activity: ‘What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value’. He develops the term ‘topophilia’ to refer to the ‘affective bonds between people and place’, while, in turn, these bonds are vital to his idea of place as a ‘field of care’ (Tuan, 1974, p. 4). Its affective nature enables place exists at many different scales: ‘At one extreme a favorite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth’ (Tuan, 1977, p. 149). Tuan developed his theory as a response to the inability of spatial science to reveal the richness of human experience: ‘Unlike the spatial analyst, who must begin by making simplifying assumptions concerning man, the humanist begins with a deep commitment to the understanding of human nature in all its intricacy’ (Tuan, 1974, p. 246).

Relph (1976, p. 8) employs the same comparison with space to conceptualize place, but explicitly adopts an experiential phenomenological perspective to it: ‘Space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analyzed. Yet, however we feel or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or

concept of place. In general it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places'. He builds upon the work of Heidegger to define place as location imbued with meaning through human involvement. He also brings into discussion the phenomenological aspect of 'intentionality' which refers to the 'aboutness' of human consciousness (Suvantola, 2002). The relationship between the self and the world is constructed through consciousness, but one cannot be conscious without being conscious of something (Suvantola, 2002). For Relph (1976, p. 43), the fundamental condition for humans to be humans is to be in place: 'The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not therefore come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences – though these are all common and perhaps necessary aspects of places. The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence'. Of major importance to the current study, Relph (1976, p. 43) goes on to state that '[t]here is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world'. The essential and existential relationship between being, place, and experience are further reinforced by Lukerman (1964) and Casey (1996).

Agnew & Duncan (1989, p. 2) propose three fundamental aspects of place as a meaningful entity: *location* - a point where something is situated, *locale* – the setting for social relations; *sense of place* – the personal and shared meanings associated with a

particular locale. This conceptualization reflects Entrikin (1991) understanding of the dualism of place as always a relative location of objects in the world and a meaningful context of human activity. Thus, *a place is simultaneously a physical, objectifiable entity encompassing a cluster of things, and a very subjective and personal center of individual and collective meanings* (Suvantola, 2002). These two elements exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship where ‘individual experience of place is, not a result of, but indeed strongly affected by structures and processes that govern the way place is constituted. At the same time, these individual experiences not only reconstitute the structures; there is always a possibility to contribute something new to them’ (Suvantola, 2002, p. 31). Ultimately, an important element of places is their people, as clearly stated by Relph (1976, p. 33): ‘Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also the reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning’. All in all, understanding these personal meanings involves the exploration not only of the structural frameworks which govern such meanings but also of the emotional and intellectual worlds of the individuals (Suvantola, 2002).

Regarding place meaning, a significant contribution to the present research is Suvantola’s book entitled *Tourist’s Experience of Place* where he distinguishes between *private* (subjective, personal meanings of and involvement with place), and *public* character of place (meanings and symbolism of place shared by whole societies). Similarly, Tuan (1979) distinguishes between ‘public symbols’ and ‘fields of care’. In the same vein, Houston (1978) differentiates between the *verticality* of place (rooted in personal memories, meanings, and experiences; provider of roots and direction), and

horizontality of place (rooted in architecture, monuments, an official narrative about a place, and meanings shared by society on a large scale). This is closely linked to the dual conceptualization of place identity as comprised of the identity *of* place and the identity *with* place, as discussed in the upcoming section of the study. However, Suvantola's (2002) notes that personal and collective meanings attributed to physical objects, events, or people are both historically bound and ever-changing. This is what Pred (1986, p. 198) called the 'becoming' of place, where '*people produce history and places at the same time as people are produced by history and places*'. According to Suvantola (2002), the processes and structures affecting the place are internalized on an individual or collective level through the dialectics of the physical features of the place, the activities taking place there, and their intrinsic meanings.

Of vital significance to the present study, Keith (1988, cited in Suvantola, 2002) touches upon the phenomenological aspect of autobiographical memory and the semiotic aspect of collective memory when arguing the sometimes contested nature of public meanings: 'Places signify both social and personal experiences. The memories bound up in a particular place may be the property of one, two, or a handful of people. Places may act as signs, but the messages they communicate will not be the same for everybody who reads them'. To sum up, the essential character of tourism place 'is its combination of the material and the metaphorical' rooted in personal meanings and different combinations of signs (Crouch, 2002, p. 208).

2.5.3 (Tourism) Place Identity: Bridging between ‘Identity *with* Place’ and ‘Identity *of* Place’

While there seems to be a consensus in understanding place as space endowed with meaning (Tuan, 1974, 1977; Relph, 1976; Low & Altman, 1992; Cresswell, 2015), less agreement exists on how peoples’ bonds with places should be conceptualized. People, events, emotions, or memories of past experiences trigger emotional bonds with the places they took place in turning them into an integral part of the individual’s identity (Suvantola, 2002). A major underpinning of the current study is that ‘[p]eople are their place and a place is its people’ (Relph, 1976, p. 34), and, thus, the connection between people and places is explored from the perspective of place identity. The close link between identity and place is emphasized by McCabe & Stokoe (2004, p. 602) when stating that ‘talk about place becomes talk about identity’.

Identity is an inextricable existential concept in everyday life. As Heidegger (1969, p. 26) states: ‘Everywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of every kind, identity makes its claim upon us’. Everything that becomes the object of attention of individuals - be it people, plants, places, or nations - is given an identity or several identities as there are being infused with meaning(s) (Relph, 1976). Similarly, to the concept of ‘place’ previously discussed, the notion of ‘identity’ is so closely linked to common sense that it evades simple definition, although certain main characteristics can be identified. One fundamental feature of the association between identity and place around the current research revolves is its twofold nature: place identity is, simultaneously, identity *with* place and identity *of* place (Relph, 1976). The former aspect

- identity *of* place - refers to a 'persistent sameness' (Relph, 1976, p. 45), or a set of physical features infused with collective meaning which ensures the place's distinctiveness and continuity in time (Lewicka, 2008). Norberg-Schultz (1980) and Stedman (2003) have adopted the concept of 'genius loci' to describe the generally agreed upon character of a place. Relph (1976) claims the common identity of a place may be the result of individuals being taught to search for certain aspects of place emphasized by their cultural groups. The latter aspect – identity *with* place – is a feature of a person, not of a place, understood as 'self-categorization in terms of place' (Lewicka, 2008, p. 212), or as 'those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment' (Proshansky, 1978, p. 147). In this regard, Nairn (1965, p. 78) states that 'there are as many identities of place as there are people'. 'This is not only because each individual experiences a place from his own unique set of moments of space-time', Relph (1976, p. 56-57) argues, 'but more especially because everyone has his own mix of personality, memories, emotions, and intentions which colours his image of that place and gives it a distinctive identity for him'. Here, the concept of *place image* is used almost synonymously with place identity to define 'a mental picture that is the product of experiences, attitudes, memories, and immediate sensations. [...] The image of a place consists of all the elements associated with the experiences of individuals or groups and their intentions towards that place. Insofar as their intentions are focused and are specific, such images may be considered by others to be narrow and biased, but for those who hold them they are complete and constitute the reality of that place' (Relph, 1976, p. 56).

All in all, the current study integrally revolves around the idea that '*personal and socio-cultural identities meet in place identity*' (Buttimer, 1980, p. 167). Similarly,

Erikson (1959, cited in Relph, 1976, p. 45) proposes that ‘the term identity [...] connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself [...] and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others’. The present research phenomenologically understands identity *with* place as ‘a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings. [...] At the core of such physical environment-related cognitions is the >>environmental past<< of the person’ (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983, pp. 59-60). In the process of meaning-making, these aspects are transposed into autobiographical narratives, which, in turn, can construct place (Rickly-Boyd, 2010). In this context, remembering is the capability of ‘forming meaningful narrative sequences’ (Connerton, 1989, p. 26). Settings that evoke personal memories contribute to a stable sense of self, thus leading to strong identitarian bonds between people and place (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Identity *of* place is semiotically regarded as a ‘unifying sign [...] an identity marker [...] directly related to a collective social memory’ (Bessiere, 1998, p. 26). Thus, individual meanings and levels of identitarian bonding with place are not independent but influenced by the transgenerational meanings and values of the cultural place (Virden & Walker, 1999). This is similar to Brockmeier’s (2001, p. 221) vision of national identity as a process of semiotic mediation, where semiotic mediation refers to a cultural process through which individuals symbolically and semiotically ‘suture themselves’ into the social and cultural order of meaning and narrative program of the community they are members of. Based on a symbolic web of memory that connects minds into culture, an identitarian sense of belonging takes form (Brockmeier, 2001), as individuals naturally gain ‘membership of a symbolic textual community’ (Skultans, 1997, p. 761).

Both aspects of place identity are fundamentally linked to the concept of narrative, and ‘all attempts to elucidate the notion of personal identity [and, by extension, group identity] independently of and in isolation from the notion of narrative...are bound to fail’ (MacIntyre, 1984, cited in Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 122). Heritage sites connect personal narratives to metanarratives (Rickly-Boyd, 2010), or, in other words, link the little - family, vernacular - narrative to the big - official, public - narrative of the community (Rowe, Wertsch, & Kosyaeva, 2002). This develops into ‘a sense of belonging that binds the individual into a culture while binding the culture into the individual’s mind’ (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 18).

This dual conceptualization of place identity can be critically assumed to be rooted in the previously discussed understanding of memory as never existing outside of individuals, while never being individual in character but formed and influenced by transgenerational frameworks of social, cultural, and political memory. It is also intimately connected to Suvantola’s (2002) distinction between private and public place.

2.5.4 (Tourism) Place Construction: Bridging between Autobiographical Narrative and Cultural Materiality

Another fundamental assumption of the current study is that *tourism place-making involves both constructivist aspects of autobiographical narrative, and semiotic practices* (Rickly-Boyd, 2010). Material cues trigger personal memories and engage tourists with the site’s narrative, and ‘as these multifaceted narratives are incorporated into fuller autobiographical narratives, the site becomes place’ (Rickly-Boyd, 2010). She goes on to

propose that an experiential research approach focused on touristic narratives allows the researcher to combine constructivist and semiotic perspectives (Rickly-Boyd, 2010). In fact, heritage sites and visitors exist in a process of ‘co-construction’, where heritage sites as channels between the past and the present provide tourists the material environment to connect lived experience with myth, shared symbols, and collective remembrance in the production of a uniquely personal tourist narrative (Chronis, 2005, 2008, 2012a; Rickly-Boyd, 2010). Turner (2003) notes the ability to merge two different stories into a unique third to be among the exclusively human characteristics. This ‘co-construction’ of place mirrors the conceptualization of place identity as an interplay between identity *with* place and identity *of* place. Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry (2004, p. 10) suggest that tourism places ‘are not only or even primarily visited for their immanent attributes but also and more centrally to be woven into the webs of stories and narratives people produce when they sustain and construct their social identities’. As such sites ‘provide visitors with the raw materials (experiences) to construct a sense of identity, meaning, attachment, and stability’ (Bruner, 1994, p. 411), the construction of place arises as tourist sites are infused with personal meaning and assimilated into individuals’ life stories (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004). This mutual and reinforcing relationship is further suggested by Rickly-Boyd (2010, p. 262) who builds on the works of McAdams (1993) and Cary (2004) to argue that ‘just like the tourist is the subject of, and belongs to the tourist narrative, so too does the tourist narrative belong to the larger autobiographical narrative, as a composition of connected, yet distinct episodes of life experience’. Consequently, Rickly-Boyd (2010) goes on to propose that the appropriate way for understanding the tourist experience and the process of place construction at heritage sites

is to conduct a multidisciplinary analysis rooted in phenomenology (the first person telling of autobiographical, tourist narratives) and semiotics (the site's physical features and symbolic qualities). She justifies this approach by stating that 'narratives' constructivist and semiotic characteristics make this method more applicable for eliciting one's understanding of the world, of who they are, and their position in it' (Rickly-Boyd, 2010, p. 264).

Also of major importance to the current research is Cresswell's (2015) acknowledgment that recent studies attempt to understand particular places in all their complexity by having some of the descriptive and syncretic characteristics of early regional geographies, while, at the same time, being informed by approaches such as phenomenology and assemblage theory. These scholars aim to explore how place is meaningfully constructed by employing some innovative strategies to reveal a relatively small-scaled place as an entanglement of diverse elements and aspects using stories of people and things (Cresswell, 2015). In the same vein, Price (2004, p. 4) is interested in the power of story-telling, often conflicting narratives, to construct a place: 'narratives about people's places in places continuously materialize the entity we call place. In its materializations, however, there are conflicts, silences, exclusions. Tales are retold and their meanings wobble and shift over time. Multiple claims are made. Some stories are deemed heretical. The resulting dislocations, discontinuities, and disjunctures work to continually destabilize that which appears to be stable: a unitary, univocal place'.

There have also been scholars arguing for a shift in the perception of cultural places from solely a product of human agency to them also being repositories of collective

cultural and symbolic meanings for human societies (Cosgrove, 1989; Hitchcock & Teague, 2000; Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004; Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). Rowntree and Conkey (1980, cited in Greer, Donnelly, & Rickly, 2008, p. 14) state that cultural geography in the past has seen cultural places ‘as only a reflection of social process...[h]owever, intangibles, such as social identity are, in fact, realized by the landscape’. This reveals a feedback loop between built features and collective patterns of cognition (Greer, Donnelly, & Rickly, 2008). This development in tourism academia is in line with a similar development in the general conceptualization of place, with a series of scholars asserting the importance of the physical environment in creating places (eg. (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983; Eisenhauer, Krannich, & Blahna, 2000). In the same vein, Stedman (2003, p. 673) suggests that *individual and collective meanings attributed to places ‘are at least partially based on some material reality’*, and goes on to ask the very relevant question: ‘*Are we really like to attribute ‘wilderness’ meanings to a suburban shopping mall?’*’. Similarly, Shields (1991) proposes the nature of the physical setting to influence peoples’ bonds with places, and to strongly affect the nature of the created place. Jackson (1994) shares the same view and emphasizes that such a perspective applies to both natural and man-made entities. The current study adopts Stedman’s (2003, p. 674) view according to which ‘*[p]hysical features do not produce sense of place directly, but influence the symbolic meanings of the landscape’*, which, in turn, lead to strong bonds between people and place. The physical features exert what Mitchell (2002, p. 1) calls ‘a subtle power over people, eliciting a broad range of emotions and meanings that may be difficult to specify’. Thus, the physical features of a setting are important in bonding people with place, as places which are rooted in the local culture and clearly legible enable

people to identify with the place by constructing and following a coherent narrative (Ujang, 2012). Stedman (2003) explains that one is attached to a physical climate because it represents one's past and, in this regards, physically-based place attachment rests in the symbolic meanings that the physical aspects of a place may adopt. Strong bonds between people and place result from the continuous feedback loop between the physical attributes of a landscape and the meaning shared within a group about those attributes Nessauer (1995). More precisely, symbols can be held by both the individual and the collective (Saleebey, 2004), and are used to express the value of place while, in turn, meanings develop through the use of these symbols during interactions among the setting, the individual, and the individuals' social worlds (Wynveen, Kyle, & Sutton, 2012). In this regard, Urry perceives tourism experience as an increasingly 'signposted experience' (1995, p. 139), constructed around the production and consumption of symbols (Urry, 1990), while cultural landscapes such as heritage sites become semiotic collections of symbols to be deciphered (Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007). Kostogriz (2006, p. 183) borrows Lotman's (1990) notion of *semiosphere* to describe the cultural-semiotic space 'of communication and meaning-making without which neither intelligent nor social life would be possible'. Thus, spatial structures support cultural-semiotic activity and provide the settings for developing meaningful semiotic structures like statehood, nationhood and cultural identity (Randviir, 2002). When entering the experiential and semiotic space of a place of memory, visitors bring along their existing knowledge and experiences related to the site presentation, and, in turn, this prior knowledge influences consumers' process of interpretation, meaning-making and narrative co-construction (Chronis, 2012a). Nevertheless, it is argued that the meanings, beliefs, and knowledge

that visitors bring to the site and deeply rooted in and mediated by the socio-political and cultural frames of memory as discussed above.

Ultimately, it is through memory that people create place meaning and connect it to the self (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), which makes places of memory and individuals' identitarian bonds with place mutually dependent.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current section presents the historical, practical, and philosophical underpinnings behind the adopted methodological approach. It also depicts the practicalities of planning, conducting, and analyzing the research, as well as matters of ethics and validity.

3.1 Interpretivism – A Multi-Dimensional Bricolage Approach

The study adopts an interpretivist multidisciplinary bricolage approach rooted in hermeneutic phenomenology and Peircean semiotics. Paradigmatic considerations and justifications for combining hermeneutics and semiotics are presented below.

3.1.1 The Quantitative-Qualitative Debate

Many of the previous studies on experience have adopted a positivist approach which can be divorced from everyday life (Fishwick & Vining, 1992). More recently, the dependence of dark tourism studies on quantitative approaches rooted in (post)positivism has been emphasized and criticized by scholars such as Bowman & Pezzullo (2010), Korstanje & Ivanov (2012), Clarke, Dutton, & Johnston (2014), and Golańska (2015). Riley & Love (2000) have criticized the ever-so-popular methodologies that quantify experiences for reducing the complexities of human experiences to numbers and statistics as well as for their inadequacy to capture complete accounts of their understanding and

meaning. Contrastingly, Wilson & Hollinshead (2015) identified a proliferation of tourism studies which use qualitative approaches. Similarly, a summary of more than 100 studies presented by Light (2017) reveals the claims of positivist endeavors dominating the dark tourism academia to be unfounded. To such views, scholars have answered that studies adopting a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach also tend to lean towards a positivist methodology, which disables the researcher from seeing the dialogue between both sets of findings and placing them on an equal footing (Bryman, 2006, 2007; Bahl & Milne, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2010). Even many interpretative scholars are predisposed to employing positivist reasoning and tools to explain their findings, which, in turn, limits the scope of their research endeavors (Giorgi, 1994; Sandberg, 2005). Podoshen, Andrzejewski, Venkatesh, & Wallin (2015, p.332) go in as far as to argue that ‘the field of tourism is ripe with positivist influence and perspective’ to show how merits of interpretivist studies submitted to leading tourism journals are usually assessed based on positivist objectivity. Both Podoshen *et al.* (2015) and Light (2017) tackle the contemporaneous state of the dark tourism research to call for more alternative, interdisciplinary, analytical, and reflective approaches which give voice to the visitor while understanding the social, cultural, and political context in which the visiting experience happens. The current study attempts to be an answer to their call.

Qualitative-driven praxis enables the researcher to develop an idiographic understanding of participants, more precisely of what living with a particular condition or being in a specific condition means to them within their social reality (Bryman, 2004). Such a tendency towards idiography allows the researcher to access ‘deeper and more genuine expressions of beliefs and values that emerge through dialogue [and] foster a

more accurate description of views held' (Howe, 2004, p. 54). Moreover, qualitative approaches provide a multidimensional perception of the nuances of social reality without prioritizing the interests of those who possess power and authority within a given society (Hesse-Biber, 2010). There is also a transformative aspect of qualitative perspectives in that they revolve around social change and social justice (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

3.1.2 The Interpretivist Paradigm – A Bricolage Perspective

Based on the factors above, the current study employs an *interpretivist* paradigm, stemming from interpretive ethnography, phenomenology, semiotic and hermeneutic traditions within cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, folklore and literary criticism (Geertz, 1973; Schultz & Hatch, 1996). As per Guba (1990), paradigms are characterized through their ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

Although certain scholars remain faithful to the paradigmatic incommensurability advocated by Burrell & Morgan (1979), others have argued the need for 'breaking the paradigm mentality' (Willmott, 1993), for establishing a 'paradigm dialogue' (Guba, 1990; Denzin, 2009), in an attempt to reach an 'end of the paradigm wars' (Bryman, 2008). The latter category of researchers subscribes to eclectic enterprises focused on using a multi-method and multi-theory approach considered as the most suitable for the investigation at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Schultz & Hatch, 1996; Todd, 2004). Similarly to a *bricoleur*, the qualitative researcher combines methodological ontologies and epistemologies, and selects from the rich arrays of practices, tools, and methods available in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the investigated subject (Howard,

1983; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher-as-bricoleur develops a bricolage, a 'complex, dense, reflective, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3), or 'a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). According to Jamal & Everett (2004, p. 1), 'interdisciplinary bricoleurs' bring together 'multiple methods and perspectives, synthesizing social theory, epistemology and methodology' to address the research objectives. Such a bricolage approach to research is based on aspects such the recognition of the limitations of a single method, the discursive boundaries of one disciplinary strategy, the inseparability of known and knower, and the intricate nature of all human experience (Kincheloe, 2001). In fact, bricoleur researchers boast a high level of appreciation of the complexity of everyday life, embedded in concepts of: explicate and implicate orders of reality, the questioning of universalism, polysemy, the living process in which cultural entities are situated, intersecting contexts, the cultural assumptions within all research methods, or the relationship between power and knowledge (Kincheloe, 2005). Adding to the complexity of the bricoleur's understanding of the research process are three notions of vital importance to the current study: intertextuality – all narratives gain meaning from both their connection to material reality and their relationship to other narratives; discursive construction – all knowledge production is influenced consciously or unconsciously by discursive practices; the interpretive aspect of all knowledge – interpretation is an unavoidable aspect of life and is always at work in the act of knowledge production (Kincheloe, 2005).

Taking these complexities into account, Kincheloe (2005) builds on the work of Denzin & Lincoln (2000) to identify five dimensions of the bricolage. The first one, *methodological bricolage*, uses a varied range of data-gathering strategies, such as interviewing techniques of ethnography, historical research methods, discursive analysis of language, semiotic analysis of signs, phenomenological analysis of consciousness, psychoanalytical tools, or textual analysis of documents. The second one, *theoretical bricolage*, adopts a rich knowledge of social theoretical positions to frame and support the process of meaning-making. The third one, *interpretive bricolage*, employs a diversity of interpretive tactics and tools stemming from the field of hermeneutics and the ability to use the hermeneutic circle. The interpretations of different participants in the interpretive process are observed, analyzed and understood in relation to both one another, and to the larger social, cultural, political, economic, psychological, theoretical, and educational structures. This aspect enables the researcher to access a wide spectrum of perspectives on a particular topic. The fourth one, *political bricolage*, recognizes that all research processes hold political implications and encourages researchers to investigate tacit forms of power which shape the collected information and produced knowledge. The fifth one, *narrative bricolage*, acknowledges the fact that all research knowledge is influenced by the participants' narratives on the topic in question. It is these insights which empower bricoleur researchers to emancipate themselves 'from the tyranny of prespecified, intractable research procedures', draw upon conceptual and methodological toolkits in a multidisciplinary manner, according to the nature of their research and the investigated phenomenon (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 340).

In the tourism field, Jamal & Hollinshead (2001) remember Jamal's (1997) study where the author assumed the role of a bricoleur by applying a multi-theory methodology rooted in constructionism and hermeneutics to address the complex relationships between micro-level (individual experiences) and macro-level (societal influences). More recently, Becken (2011) explicitly employed an interdisciplinary bricoleur approach in her critical review of the relationship between oil and the tourism industry. Her justification for using an interdisciplinary analysis is based on the lack of clear boundaries of the phenomenon, the context-dependent interpretation of 'facts', and the multi-dimensional nature of activities relevant to tourism and oil. Although not explicitly stated, Rakić & Chambers (2012) also adopt a multidisciplinary methodology when investigating the simultaneous consumption and construction of tourist places.

Taking into consideration the aspects discussed above, the current study remains faithful to the paradigmatic principles of ontology and epistemology but employs a multidisciplinary approach to them. By looking for *relevant* alternative ontologies and epistemologies *within* the interpretivist tradition, the present research avoids going into blatant relativism or pragmatism, while, at the same time, acknowledging that the qualitative bricoleur 'can only work in piecemeal fashion to an *emergent research scheme* rather than to a closely detailed preconceived research design' (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001, p. 71). Overarching ontologies and epistemologies which enable the researcher to investigate and capitalize on both heterogeneities and homogeneities, and on reflective and unreflective knowledge and practices are required.

3.1.3 Ontology: ‘Minimal Hermeneutic Realism’

To account for the new ontological insights into such complexity discussed above, bricoleur scholars argue for a new ontological context which can no longer accept the status of the investigated object as plainly a thing-in-itself (Kincheloe, 2001). ‘Any social, cultural, psychological, or pedagogical object of inquiry is inseparable from its context, the language used to describe it, its historical situatedness in a larger ongoing process, and the socially and culturally constructed interpretations of its meaning(s) as an entity in the world’ (Morawski, 1997, cited in Kincheloe, 2001, p. 682). Moreover, meanings are not fixed in time and space, but continuously negotiated and changed by historical, social, cultural, economic, political, psychological, and pedagogical forces, while this dynamic relationship between individuals and their contexts shapes the identities of human beings and the nature of the intricate social fabric (Kincheloe, 2005).

Accordingly, the present research adopts an ontology which Dreyfus (1995, cited in Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 107) labels as ‘*minimal hermeneutic realism*’. Dreyfus developed this concept to characterize the work of Martin Heidegger in general and his influential writing *Being and Time* in particular. Here, Heidegger argues that ‘[o]nly human beings make sense of things. So the intelligibility of each kind of thing, including natural things, depends upon our practices. Still nature as a being, or as an ensemble of beings, need not depend on us, for one way we make sense of things - find them intelligible - is as merely occurrent’ (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 10). An extremely complex endeavor, *Being and Time* has been interpreted as combining elements of realism, relativism, and pragmatism (Guignon, 1993; Wheeler, 2011). Larkin, Watts, & Clifton

(2006, p. 107) captured the essence of *minimal hermeneutic realism* and its roots in both realism and relativism in the following statement: ‘What is *real* is not dependent on us, but the exact meaning and nature of *reality* is’. Belonging to realism is the acknowledgment that nature exists in itself, while belonging to relativism is the recognition that the meanings attributed to natural elements are socio-culturally constructed and constantly changing (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). In short, the minimal hermeneutic realist recognizes that nothing is ever revealed as anything except when it is ‘brought meaningfully into the context of human life’ (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 107). Thus, what counts as ‘real’ becomes a societal convention, while any discovery is dependent upon the process of intellectual construction which shapes the ‘structure of encounter’ (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 107). Considering the emergent ‘reality’ is inevitably a function of the relationship between the researcher and the subject under investigation, it is obligatory to identify the researcher as an inclusive part of the described world (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Touching upon pragmatism, the minimal hermeneutic realist takes into consideration that the chosen approaches must, to some extent, adhere to what the collective believes they already know about the investigated subject (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Even more importantly, the minimal hermeneutic realist understands that the nature of a subject-matter unavoidably places limitations on what can be revealed and that the rich outcomes can only be obtained through approaches which are responsive and sensitive to this nature (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

3.1.4 Epistemological Considerations: Subjectivity and Semiotics

The research assumes an epistemology which revolves around and reflects a series of fundamental ideas. In accordance with Riessman's (1994), the study understands that *meaning-making is always both an individual and social product*. It also builds on Eatough & Smith's (2006b, p. 117) concern that the 'interpreting meaning-making person is reduced to the internal cognitive activity of hypothesized causal relationships'. Additionally, as seen, places of dark memories are characterized by a high degree of emotional involvement. Taking this aspect into account, the present research, in the same line with Parkinson & Manstead (1992), understands emotional experience as a cognitive evaluation process, as well as a result of individuals' interactions with other people, own and other bodies, and own physical environment. All in all, a fundamental assumption of the current research, adopted and adapted from the work of Eatough & Smith (2006b), is that individual sense-making is a process which involves individuals' interpreting of the events in one's life, while being inevitably mediated by social, cultural and political frameworks of collective memory. 'In their appreciation of epistemological complexity', Kincheloe (2005, p. 329) states, 'bricoleurs seek out diverse epistemologies for their unique insights and sophisticated modes of making meaning. In this search, they gain provocative insights into epistemological diversity on issues of the relationships between mind and body, Self and Other, spirit and matter, knower and known, things-in-themselves and relationships, logic and emotion, and so forth'. Consequently, the epistemological underpinning for the first section of the investigation concerned with exploring individual interpretation through autobiographical memory and personal narratives is *subjectivity* – findings are literally the creation of the interactive process

between the researcher and the researched into. The epistemological underpinning for the second section of the investigation concerned with examining the framework of cultural, social and political memory and official narratives is *semiotics* – human experience ‘is an interpretive structure mediated and sustained by signs’ (Deely, 1990, p. 5).

3.1.5 Interdisciplinary Methods: IPA and Peircean Semiotics

Under the interepretivist umbrella, the current study employs two approaches rarely used in tourism studies before: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the Peircean semiotic theory of signs. Traditionally, scholars propose against mixing methods across paradigms in order to not violate the purpose and integrity of each paradigm (Filstead, 1979; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Guba, 1990). However, ‘*researchers can appropriately mix methods within a paradigm*’ (Leininger, 1992, p. 395). Even within the same paradigm, mixing qualitative methods is not a smooth attempt, as each discipline has its own historical approaches to theories and method, variations in the language and in what constitutes data (Okely, 1994; Barbour, 1998). Researchers’ choice of qualitative methods depends on a range of factors such as their own disciplinary background, professional and research training, or research experience (Barbour, 1998). A great degree of cyclicity and self-interest also comes into play, as observed by Trow (1957, cited in Barbour, 1998, p. 354): ‘Every cobbler thinks leather is the only thing – most [researchers] have their favorite research methods with which they are familiar and have some skill in using [...] We mostly choose to investigate problems that seem amenable to attack through these methods’. This reflects the intricate and sometimes messy nature of research

already emphasized by Bechhofer (1974, p. 73): ‘the research process is not a clear-cut sequence of procedures following a neat pattern, but a messy interaction between the conceptual and empirical world, deduction and induction occurring at the same time’.

However, in recent years, scholars are starting to explore mixing qualitative approaches in their studies (e.g., Moran-Ellis, *et al.*, 2006; Dicks, Soyinka, & Coffey, 2006; Frost, 2009; Clark, 2011; Dicks, 2014). This trend seems to be mirrored in the tourism academia. For example, within the boundaries of the Actor-Network Theory, Paget, Dimanche, & Mounet (2010) use a qualitative multi-methods approach – participant observation, in-depth interviews and collection of existing documents – to investigate aspects of innovation in a chosen case study. Prayag & Ryan (2011) employ a combination of thematic analysis and content analysis software CatPac to explore the role of nationality in the relationship between the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of a tourist destination. Highly relevant for the current study is Rakić & Chambers’ (2012) multidisciplinary approach – phenomenological and semiotic – to rethinking the consumption of tourist places. These studies come to reinforce Mason’s (2006) two basic premises for promoting the use of multi-dimensional research strategies in qualitative studies. The first one is that, to understand the practicalities and meanings of relationships, how and why they do or do not endure, how they are remembered, reproduced or reacted against, creative methodologies and methods which open and broaden researchers’ perspective to the multi-dimensionality of the lived realities are needed. The second one is that multi-dimensional and social lives are experienced and enacted simultaneously on a macro level (social, cultural, ‘public’, political narratives and organization) and a micro level (‘subjective’, ‘individual’).

Having these premises as a starting point, Mason (2006) goes on to propose three sets of reasons for mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way. Firstly, such approaches encourage scholars to think ‘outside the box’ and explore new and creative dimensions of experience in social life, and intersections between these dimensions. Critically, the reasoning for choosing the methods should be governed by the research questions. Secondly, a particular strength of multi-dimensional approaches lies in the ability to build upon and moving beyond social scientists’ tendency to locate their research actions on one side or the other of the micro-macro boundary. By seeing micro and macro as closely connected in a constant and fluid interplay and by using theoretically-driven empirical research, the focus of the research is upon how lived experience and life narratives are connectedly or simultaneously big and little, public or private, and so on. Thirdly, a multi-dimensional mix of qualitative methods offers the immense potential of answering the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about the phenomenon under scrutiny, and, thus, to provide rich and in-depth knowledge of the dynamics and shades of social processes, change, and contexts based on which cross-contextual comparisons can be generated and critical assumptions can be drawn. This is important because ‘understanding how social processes and phenomena are contingent upon or embedded upon specific contexts is a vital part of meaningful social explanation’ (Mason, 2006, p. 17).

Mason’s (2006, p. 18) conceptualization of *context* is of high importance to the present study. She defines ‘context’ as ‘associated surroundings’ and emphasizes the crucial nature of ‘association’ understood as the necessity of analysis to show how different elements, theories and notions employed are connected to the issues and objectives of the study, and, hence, how they are *contextual* rather than coincidental. More

precisely, Mason (2006, p. 19) sums it up when stating that ‘exploring context in the sense of >>associated surroundings<< means mediating between and conceptualizing beyond aggregate or individual, micro or macro. It also means allowing some fluidity between theoretical approaches. Given the multi-dimensionality of social experience, we would do well, up against this challenge, to be interested in and to draw upon different theoretically informed approaches to conceptualizing context, rather than insisting upon the primacy of only one worldview’.

Understood multi-dimensionally and dependent on the focus of study, place identity can be seen as the context of the current research bridging autobiographical and collective memories, personal and public narratives, individual and official identities, vernacular and global signs and symbols.

3.1.6 Combining Hermeneutics and Peircean Semiotics – Can It Be Done?

Of vital importance to the current research is Silverman (1994) discussion on whether or not hermeneutics and Peircean semiotics can be combined in the same study. Having thoroughly and critically analyzed the Saussurean and Peircean semiotics both in relationship to each other and to the field of hermeneutics, Silverman is able to reconfirm Sini’s (1978) view that ‘*Peircean semiotics can be combined with hermeneutics in that the theory of signs can operate in relation to the world with its objects and grounding by situating itself within the hermeneutic circle*’ (1994, p. 30). Both hermeneutics and the Peircean semiotic theory of signs allow for plural meanings. ‘The text, in hermeneutics, is that which offers its meaning through the *event* of the text as it is interpreted in relation

to the world and as a reflection back upon the interpreting self' (Silverman, 1994, p. 30). The text, in the Peircean semiotic theory of signs, unfolds its plurisignificant dimensions through multiple readings and by referring to the world iconically, indexically, and symbolically (Silverman, 1994). These concepts and theories are individually discussed at later moments of the present study. Thus, both approaches invite the engagement of researchers in interpretative processes, while combining hermeneutics and the Peircean semiotic theory of signs may 'offer a reading of the text in terms of its meaning structures as they relate to elements in the world and as they refer back not as a centered self but to the interpretive activity itself' (Silverman, 1994, p. 30).

Fundamentally, *the two approaches adopted by the current research – IPA and Peircean semiotic theory of signs - must be understood as distinct to one another, not overlapping but supporting and reinforcing each other towards meeting the main declared objective of the study.* They come together into an 'integrated framework', where each method and form of data informs the researcher about a specific part of 'the picture', while the linking of these parts can produce a more holistic and robust picture (Mason, 2006, p. 20). More precisely, IPA is used to reveal autobiographical memories, personal narratives, and individual construction of self and place identity. A semiotic reading rooted in the Peircean theory of signs is conducted to unfold elements of collective memory and to identify the (in)existence of an official master narrative. Based on the interpretative interplay of these aspects within the limitations of the chosen ontology and epistemology, critical assumptions can be drawn on the construction of place identity at the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Romania.

3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

One fundamental assumption behind Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is the acknowledgment that different individuals experience the world in very different ways, depending on their prior life experiences, personalities, and motivations (Smith & Osborn, 2008a). Accordingly, IPA is an approach to qualitative research concerned with the detailed exploration and understanding of the participants' personal and social 'lifeworlds', and their subjective experience of the topic under investigation (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). IPA revolves around the in-depth examination of participants' perception of a specified phenomenon, object or event, how they make sense of these experiences, and the meanings they attach to them (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2008b). In the current study, this specific phenomenon is the political repression under the Communist regime in Romania analyzed in the context of the former Sighet Penitentiary meanwhile transformed in the Sighet Memorial Museum. This IPA approach contrasts most psychology which is concerned with: trying to test researcher's pre-existing hypotheses; calculating average results for a group of participants; and aiming to derive a quantitative measure of an objective reality (Smith & Osborn, 2008a).

3.2.1 The Development of IPA

IPA was introduced by Professor Jonathan Smith (1996b) in his seminal paper on the need of psychology to move beyond the divide between cognition and discourse. It was proposed as an alternative but complementary approach to the more established quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the psychology field. Over the last two

decades, the philosophical, theoretical and practical underpinnings of the approach were systematically further developed and refined. A synthesis conducted by Smith (2011) identified 293 high-quality empirical IPA studies, and revealed a steady increase in the number of publications from five papers in 1997 to 21 in 2002 and 71 in 2008. The method has thrived in the field of health psychology (Jarman, Smith, & Walsh, 1997; Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; Shaw, 2011), but has also attracted interest from associated fields such as social, clinical and counselling psychology (Smith, 2004). Firmly rooted in psychology, IPA researchers working have mostly been interested in exploring the lived experience of disruptions caused by physical conditions such as chronic pain, neurology, heart disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, or cancer, and mental conditions such as dementia or different kinds of addiction (Smith, 2004). IPA studies have also gone beyond the direct experience of the individual with a specific health condition to focus instead on the indirect experiences of significant others such as family members understanding their roles in families with a child with acute leukaemia (Hill, Higgins, Dempster, & McCarthy, 2009), or complex chronic pain (Jordan, Eccleston, & Osborn, 2007). Recent IPA work has enabled the voices of previously under-researched groups to be heard, including children (Petalas, Hastings, Nash, Dowey, & Reilly, 2009), individuals with intellectual disabilities (Clarkson, Murphy, Coldwell, & Dawson, 2009), and people with psychosis (Quin, Clare, Ryan, & Jackson, 2009). Although the preponderance of IPA work is focused on impairment or disease (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005), IPA researchers seem to also begin investigating the positive aspect which have the potential to improve the quality of life of individuals living with particular health conditions (Perry, Taylor, & Shaw, 2007; Reynolds, Vivat,

& Prior, 2008). Of vital importance for the current study is Smith's (2004) argument according to which the key organizing principle emerging from qualitative research in general and the IPA corpus in particular is *identity* in all of its labels, forms, manifestations, and complexities.

In the field of tourism, phenomenology has been adopted by a series of scholars with the purpose of understanding and describing the experiential and lived existence of diverse stakeholders taking part in the tourism phenomenon (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). A thorough discussion of tourism phenomenology follows below. However, only one tourism study has explicitly employed IPA. Malone, McCabe, & Smith (2014) used it as a tool for exploring how hedonism is individually experienced and how hedonic experiences influence future ethical behavior, and the results reveal valuable in-depth experiential information on the investigated topic. Thus, although boasting a high potential to reveal detailed experiential processes, IPA is a mostly unexplored terrain in tourism and the current study aims to fill in this gap.

3.2.2 Distinguishing IPA from Discourse Analysis

IPA is sharing the high levels of popularity among qualitative approaches to social psychology with discourse analysis (see Potter, 1996). What the two approaches share is a commitment to the importance of language and qualitative analysis (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). The central aspect differentiating them is their perception of the status of cognition (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). Discourse analysis explores the *role* of language in unfolding the individual's experience, more precisely attempting to map how

verbal accounts obtained in conversations, interviewees and written documents are linguistically constructed during social interactive tasks (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2008a; Smith, 2011). Contrastingly, IPA examines how individuals ascribe *meaning* to their experiences in their interactions with the environment (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). More precisely, the IPA researcher acknowledges that people are physical, cognitive, linguistic and emotional entities, and, consequently, draws upon individuals' autobiographical memories in order to understand what the particular respondent thinks of feels about the discussed subject (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2008a). In so doing, IPA draws directly from the social cognition paradigm to assume a chain of connection between embodied experience, verbal response, cognition, and emotional reaction towards the topic under discussion (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2008b). IPA further recognizes that this chain of connection may not be transparently available from interview transcripts and other similar means, and that most of the times people have difficulties in expressing their thoughts and emotions, or might consciously choose to not disclose them for certain reasons (Smith & Osborn, 2008b). Consequently, IPA proposes that an individual's cognitive and emotional inner worlds may become available to the researcher through a careful, explicit, analytical and empathic interpretative methodology (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). In this line, it finds its roots in symbolic interactionism with its focus on individual's construction of meanings in both a personal and a social world (see Denzin, 1995). Based on these features, IPA can be chosen as a means of shedding light on the subjective perceptual process which enables certain individuals sharing or brought

together by the same context, place or event to perceive it in varied and sometimes contrasting and conflicting ways (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

3.2.3 Key Theoretical Perspectives

IPA is philosophically, theoretically and methodologically rooted in phenomenology, interpretation (hermeneutics) and idiography (Smith, 2004, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2004). Although these features are not unique to IPA, the way they have been combined and conceptualized into a reliable research tool have turned it into a distinct, successful and reliable approach in the field of phenomenological inquiry.

3.2.3.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is commonly understood as a philosophical approach to the study of structures of experience, or consciousness (Smith, 2013). Literally, phenomenology is concerned with how things appear in individuals' experience, how things are experienced by individuals, or the meanings individuals ascribe things (Smith, 2013). IPA builds upon the work of four major phenomenological philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

- **Edmund Husserl**

German philosopher Edmund Husserl is considered the founding father of phenomenology. In his *Logical Investigations* (1913) he is particularly interested in developing a way by which individuals may accurately become aware of their own experience of a given phenomenon thoroughly and rigorously which may enable them to identify the essential features of that experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2013). The potential arising from achieving this lies in these essential features of experience transcending the particular circumstances of their appearance and shedding light on similar experiences for others (Moran & Mooney, 2002; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Adopting a phenomenological attitude requires individuals to access the subjective experiential content of consciousness as they shift their attention from the objects in the world inwardly towards their perception of those objects (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2013). Stopping from the activities of everyday life to engage in conscious self-reflection on usually taken-for-granted visual images, thoughts, memories, or wishes, an individual is being phenomenological (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For Husserl, the central structure of any conscious reflection is its intentionality – understood as ‘oriented towards’ – thus, in phenomenological understanding, experience or consciousness is always directed towards something (for example, remembering is remembering of something) by virtue of particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images which make up its meaning and appropriate enabling environment (Moran & Mooney, 2002; Luft & Overgaard, 2013; Smith, 2013). That something – be it a perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, embodied action, social activity, or linguistic activity – may have been triggered by a perception or interaction of a ‘real’ object in the

world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2013). For IPA researchers, Husserl's phenomenological work is important in setting the agenda for the profound and methodical examination of the content of consciousness, although IPA separates from Husserl's essentialist undertakes and has a more focused ambition of attempting to investigate specific experiences as experienced by specific people (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

- **Martin Heidegger**

Husserl's student, German philosopher and seminal thinker Martin Heidegger, moves away from his master's transcendental work to establish the beginnings of the hermeneutic and existential emphases in phenomenological philosophy. Rather than trying to illuminate essences of experience as Husserl did, Heidegger works towards revealing the conscious meanings attributed to what he calls *the world* (Cerbone, 2014). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that phenomenology had failed to acknowledge humans as existential beings, while questioning the possibility of knowledge existing outside of an interpretative stance. Rather than aiming to develop a technique of understanding, Koch (1995) states, one should perceive Heidegger's work as an attempt to shed light on the conditions in which understanding takes place. He does so by trying to establish the fundamental nature of *Dasein* as a uniquely situated, temporal and historical *being-in-the-world*, essentially embedded in reality and immersed in interpretive relationships with people, objects, and things (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Luft & Overgaard, 2013).

Fundamentally, objects and nature exist in themselves, but they gain meaning through human interpretation. As Heidegger (1985, p. 217) claims: 'It must be stated that the entity as an entity is 'in itself' and independent of any apprehension of it; yet, the being of the entity is found only in encounter and can be explained, made understandable, only from the phenomenal exhibition and interpretation of the structure of encounter'. Heidegger's concept of 'worldliness' reflects the inescapable nature of Dasein as always and indelibly a worldly person-in-context already thrown into the pre-existing and ready-to-be-used world of people, objects, language, and culture and cannot be meaningfully detached from it (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In the same vein, Larkin, Watts, & Clifton (2006) warn about the mistake of believing that individuals can occasionally choose to interpretatively engage with and attribute meanings to otherwise meaningless objects. Rather, within Heideggerian phenomenology, '[i]nterpretation should not be understood as a tool for knowledge, but as the way human beings are (as part of the hermeneutic circle). [...] Understanding occurs throughout culturally and historically mediated interpretations and relationships with objects and things, and through the social meanings contained in language' (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1064). Indeed, *logos* – understood as language or discourse - is a fundamental concept for Heidegger as it enables researchers to access both visible and latent or disguised meanings of 'the thing itself' as it emerges into the light through interpretation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Heidegger's hermeneutic approach to phenomenology is emphasized by Moran (2000, p. 229) when stating that '[p]henomenology is seeking after a meaning which is perhaps hidden by the entity's mode of appearing. In that case, the proper model for seeking meaning is the interpretation of a text, and for this reason, Heidegger links

phenomenology with hermeneutics. How things appear or are covered up must be explicitly studied. The things themselves always present themselves in a manner which is at the same time self-concealing'. The phenomenologist can facilitate the appearing of the phenomenon and aim at making sense of the appearing, but such a process revolves around the Heideggerian hermeneutic-phenomenological concept of *historicity*. This notion sees embodied behavior, interpretative experience and understanding of the world as grounded in and shaped by pre-understandings or fore-structures such as one's ethical and cultural context, background and traditions (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). The current study argues the transgenerational frameworks of social, cultural and political memory to act precisely as such fore-structures. Indeed, Heidegger makes a convincing argument that 'it is impossible to ignore the subjectivizing influences of language, culture, ideology, expectations, or assumptions [...] Heidegger makes the human individual a part of reality, rather than an ego dualistically separated from the world, thereby reconciling relativism and realism' (Rennie, 1996, cited in Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 105). Consequently, the main goal of Heideggerian phenomenology is to engage the object under investigation in a sensitive and responsive manner which allows for the maximum opportunity to reveal itself 'in itself' (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

As the name suggests, Heidegger's conceptualization of phenomenology as explicitly interpretative is fundamental to the understanding and practice of IPA. Beyond the ontological implication mentioned above, it becomes vital for IPA scholars to perceive the human being as inextricably 'thrown into' a world of objects, relationships, and language, always a historical, temporal and perspectival 'person-in-context', and at all times engaged in sense-making 'in-relation-to' something (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin,

2009). Thus, (re)interpreting individuals' meaning-making processes lies at the core of IPA research. IPA researchers also recognize that experience is not only individual and rooted in personal biographies, but also essentially linked with and shaped by society, culture and history (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The omnipresent two-way link between interpretation and one's fore-structures enables IPA to re-evaluate the role of bracketing when interpreting qualitative data and shift from Husserl's rigid understanding to Heidegger's dynamic, enlivened and cyclical process based on the hermeneutical circle.

- **Maurice Merleau-Ponty**

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty draws generously on Husserl and Heidegger to develop his own vision of contextualized phenomenology. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty (1945) agrees with Heidegger on human beings' interpretive quality of knowing about the world but adopts an *embodied* perspective to existence. (Luft & Overgaard, 2013; Smith, 2013). Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 408) captures the essence of his existential, embodied phenomenology, when stating: 'Insofar as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world'. For him, individuals engage with the world as *body-subjects*: 'The body no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Rising important implications for IPA is

Merleau-Ponty argument that, even though one can observe and be empathetic towards another, ultimately the others' experiences can never fully be shared as it belongs to their own embodied positions in the world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

- **Jean-Paul Sartre**

French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre adheres to Heidegger's understanding of human beings as engaged with the world they inhabit in an action-oriented, sense-making, self-conscious manner. In *Existentialism and Humanism* Sartre proposes individuals' constant process of becoming when arguing that existence precedes essence (1948). In a later work, *Being and Nothingness*, he stresses the importance of both present and absent things towards defining individuals' nature and perception of the world (1956). Important for IPA research is Sartre's statement according to which individuals' becoming is always influenced by 'complex issues, which need to also be seen within the context of the individual life, the biographical history and the social climate in which the individual acts' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

3.2.3.2 Hermeneutics

Tracing its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, hermeneutics is defined as the theory and practice of the interpretation of the meaning of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions (Rennie, 1999; Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). The interpretative tendency of IPA is rooted in the ideas of three hermeneutic theorists: Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and

Gadamer (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Since Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological stance has already been discussed in the previous section, the current one only unfolds Schleiermacher's and Gadamer's hermeneutic visions.

- **Friedrich Schleiermacher**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the German theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher was the first who managed to draw together the intellectual currents of the time into articulating a coherent conception of a universal hermeneutics, one which does not relate to one particular kind of textual material, such as the Bible or ancient texts, but to linguistic meaning in general (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). In his opinion, understanding cultures or individuals should not be taken for granted, as the process involves an acknowledgment of the fact that what appears true, rational, or coherent may conceal something deeply unfamiliar (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). He proposes this is because all language-use is positioned somewhere between radical individuality and radical universality, neither of these extremes existing in an entirely pure form (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). All use of language involves grammar and a shared symbolic vocabulary, yet these shared resources are used in more or less individual manners (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). Thus, according to Schleiermacher, interpretation involves two aspects: grammatical – concerned with objective and precise textual meanings, and psychological – referring to the individuality of the speaker or author (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). 'Every person', he argues, 'is on the one hand a location in which a given language forms itself in an individual manner, on the other their

discourse can only be understood via the totality of language. But then the person is also a spirit which continually develops, and their discourse is only one act of this spirit of connection with the other acts' (Schleiermacher, 1998, p. 8). The interpretative meaning 'is available for the interpretations of a reader, but those interpretations must also be accommodated to the wider context in which the text was originally produced' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 22). Such an approach admitting that a phenomenon, although experienced individually in a specific way, is lived within a shared context can reveal both intentional and unintentional motivations of the original author (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For Schleiermacher, interpretation is not an exercise in following mechanical rules, but rather an art involving the combination of different skills. Rather, if engaged in a holistic, detailed and comprehensive interpretative analysis, one can obtain 'an understanding of the utter better than he understands himself' (Schleiermacher, 1998, p. 226).

Strongly reflected in the IPA approach is Schleiermacher's proposal that the interpretative analyst may be able to provide a different perspective on the text to the author's. The opportunity of such an interpretation lies in the shared ground between the interpreter and the individual being interpreted: '[Interpretation] depends on the fact that every person, besides being an individual themselves, has a receptivity for all other people. But this itself seems only to rest on the fact that everyone carries a minimum of everyone else within themselves, and divination is consequently excited by comparison with oneself' (Schleiermacher, 1998, cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 23).

- **Hans-Georg Gadamer**

Heidegger's student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, attempts to bring his master's work into the field of human sciences. In his 30-year academic project entitled *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2014) tries to combine Heidegger's concept of the world-disclosive synthesis of understanding with the notion of *Bildung*, or education in culture (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). He analyses historical and literary texts and emphasizes the effect of history and tradition on the interpretative process. For Gadamer, it is through language that the world becomes accessible to individuals, and, thus, the starting point for individuals to understand themselves is to understand themselves as situated in a linguistically mediated, historical culture (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). This has consequences for an individual's understanding of any subject area of the human sciences. Giving the example of historical texts, Gadamer proposes that, as part of one's own tradition, these texts are part of the worldview-shaping horizon and cannot reveal themselves to individuals as neutral and value-free objects of scientific inquiry (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). Moreover, tradition is always alive in a state of constant development, while the original intentions of the author and meanings to contemporaries can never be fully recreated due to the historical gap (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Instead, Gadamer builds on the work of Hegel to propose interpretation as a dialogue between the present and past: 'the essential nature of the historical spirit consists not in the restoration of the past but in *thoughtful mediation with contemporary life*' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 161). The past is handed over to individuals through complex and ever-changing fabrics of interpretation, which get richer and more intricate with the passing of time (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). This is directly linked to the

transgenerational frameworks of social, cultural, and political memory previously discussed. All in all, Gadamer (2004, p. 269) claims similarly to Heidegger, there is a complex relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted: ‘It is necessary to keep one’s gazes fixed on the things throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpreter himself. A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text [...] Working out this fore-projection which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there’. Rather than bracketing one’s prejudices before doing interpretation, one’s preconceptions – aspects of cultural horizon taken for granted – only really reveal themselves once the interpretation is underway (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This process that Gadamer refers to as *the fusion of horizons* is highly dynamic and complex: ‘Every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. The constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation’ (Gadamer, 2004, p. 269). By engaging in interpretation and entering a dialogical relationship with the past, individuals participate in the creation of a richer context of meaning and gain a deeper understanding not only of the subject under investigation but also of themselves (Moran, 2000; Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005).

Fundamental for any IPA study in general and for IPA methodologies in particular, obtaining a fusion of horizons requires the tacit capacity of engaging the subject in a productive, open and sensitive manner: ‘Only the person who knows how to

ask questions is able to persist in his questioning which involves being able to preserve his orientation towards openness [...] It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning. For we have seen that to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. A person skilled in the 'art' of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion. [...] Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strengths. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter' (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 360-361).

- **Phenomenology and Hermeneutics**

The co-dependency of phenomenology and hermeneutics is explicitly summarized by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009, p. 37): 'Without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenology would not be seen'. IPA is committed to attempting to understand one's experience as the participant makes sense of it through a narrative account (Smith & Osborn, 2008a; 2008b). The approach also accepts the impossibility of gaining direct access to participants' experience due to different layers of resistance such as hidden meanings, linguistic signals, contextual circumstances, or what Smith (2004) called the researcher's own 'biographical presence'. Based on this, IPA acknowledges that any investigation must necessarily involve

sustained interpretative engagement by the researcher and close interactions between researcher and participant while remaining grounded in the interview text (Smith & Osborn, 2008a, 2008b; Finlay, 2011). Such a positive process of engaging with the participant is perceived as more important than the process of bracketing preconceptions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

- **‘Double Hermeneutics’**

The hermeneutic commitment of IPA is reflected in its use of a ‘*double hermeneutic*’ (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 51), defined as ‘a process whereby participants make sense of *x* while researchers make sense of participants’ sense-making’ (Finlay, 2011, p. 141). Such an approach to hermeneutics affords the researcher an opportunity to interpret and draw critical assumptions about what it means for the participant to have shared certain autobiographical memories and life narratives in a particular social, cultural, and theoretical context (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Building on Ricoeur’s (1970) distinction between the hermeneutics of empathy and the hermeneutics of suspicion, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) propose another way in which IPA operates a double hermeneutic: it combines the hermeneutics of empathy with the hermeneutics of questioning. On the one hand, the IPA researcher aims to adopt an ‘insider’s’ perspective, get as ‘close’ to the participant’s view as possible, and try to stand in their shoes. On the other hand, the IPA researcher also wants to stand alongside the participants, see them from different angles, ask questions and interpret their answers. ‘Successful IPA research’, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009, p. 36) argue, ‘combines both stances – it is

empathic *and* questioning, and the simple word >>understanding<< captures this neatly. We are attempting to understand, both in the sense of >>trying to see what it is like for someone<< and in the sense of >>analyzing, illuminating, and making sense of something<<'. Although rooted in Ricoeur's aforementioned distinction, IPA's hermeneutics of questioning – focused on reading from within the body of text the participant has produced, differ from Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion – based on importing a reading from without (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The IPA research process is an intricate and dynamic interplay between induction and deduction when the meaning is co-constructed through the ebb and flow between researcher and participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

- **The Hermeneutic Circle**

The cyclicity of the interpretative and meaning-making process is rooted in one of the cornerstones of hermeneutic theory: *the hermeneutic circle*. It is concerned with the dynamic connection between the part and the whole: to understand any part, one looks to the whole; to understand the whole, one looks to the parts (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). Originally conceived in terms of the relationship between the parts and the whole of the text, the meaning of the hermeneutic circle has been expanded by Schleiermacher to include the text's connection to historical and theoretical tradition and culture at large (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). Heidegger conceptualized it based on the interplay between an individual's self-understanding and own understanding of the world (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). Gadamer added co-determination to the previous versions of hermeneutic

circle, according to which individuals' background-influenced reading adds depth of meaning to the interplay between the parts and the whole of the text (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). These insights raise essential implications for IPA researchers in terms of adopting a dynamic, non-linear, iterative process of analysis which enables them to move back and forth through different levels of data interpretation and ways of meaning-making (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

3.2.3.3 Idiography

What separates IPA from other hermeneutic approaches is the commitment to focus on the individual and prioritize the participant's meaning-making (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). While committed to the phenomenological tradition of investigating lived experience, IPA perceives experience as either a first-order activity or second-order affective and cognitive responses to that activity, such as remembering, regretting, and so on (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Based on this, IPA assumes a more focused perspective on examining subjective experience by always investigating the subjective experience of 'something' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Thus, the third significant influence upon IPA is idiography.

- **Focus on Specifics**

Idiography generally revolves around *specifics*, concentrating on how specific individuals deal with and make sense of specific significant situations, places or events,

in the specific contexts in which those experiences occur (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Such an approach contrasts nomothetic inquiry which transforms psychological and experiential phenomena into aggregations and inferential statistics (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Kanstenbaum describes this type of analyses as ‘indeterministic statistical zones that construct people who never were and never could be’ (cited in Datan, Rodeheaver, & Hughes, 1987). Accordingly, IPA’s commitment to *specifics* operates on two levels: in the reflective focus on personal experience based on assuming people are sense-making creatures, and in the detail and depth of the micro-level analysis provided (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

- **The Case for the Case**

The *case* has been proposed as central to the IPA inquiry. Scholars have promoted the positive value of the case study towards insightfully revealing existence (Yin, 2014), spotting out flaws in existing theoretical claims for populations (Platt, 1988), confirming or disconfirming expectations (Campbell, 1975), and supporting human learning and enabling individuals to develop from ‘rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 219). Surprisingly, support for the use of case studies comes from a pioneer statistician, Francis Galton, who states: ‘Acquaintance with particulars is the beginning of all knowledge – scientific or otherwise [...] starting too soon with analysis and classification, we run the risk of tearing mental life into fragments and beginning with false cleavages that misrepresent the salient organizations and natural integrations in

personal life' (1883, cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 31). Several studies in the past have criticized cases and case studies for not being able to 'provide reliable information about the broader class' (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1984, p. 34), for their low validity unless linked to hypotheses (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990), or for their absence of control and subsequent lack of scientific value (Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Dogan & Pelassy, 1990).

- **Flyvbjerg's Five Misunderstandings about Cases**

Flyvbjerg (2006) proposes that criticisms of cases such as the ones mentioned above are the result of five misunderstandings or oversimplifications and takes on the challenge to tackle and revise each of them.

The first misunderstanding is: 'general, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 221). The author argues that, regarding predictive theory, universals, and scientism, the study of human affairs is at a perpetual beginning. That is why the first misunderstanding can be revised as: *'Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals'* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 221).

The second misunderstanding – that cases and case studies cannot lead to generalization and contribute to scientific development – is rephrased as: *'One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific*

development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas >>the force of example<< is underestimated' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 228).

Derived from the second one, the third misunderstanding – that case method is mostly useful for generating hypotheses to be tested by other methods at later stages of the research process – is revised as follows: *'The case study is useful for both generating and testing of hypotheses but is not limited to these research activities alone'* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229).

After revision, the fourth misunderstanding – that the case method supposedly contains a bias towards the verification or confirmation of the researcher's preconceived ideas – reads: *'The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher's preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry. On the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification'* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 237).

The fifth misunderstanding is that narratives encapsulating the complexities and contradictions of real life cannot be summarized into neat scientific formulae, general propositions, and theories. After revision, it read as follows: *'It is correct that summarizing case studies is often difficult, especially as concerns case process. It is less correct as regards case outcomes. The problems in summarizing case studies, however, are due more often to the properties of the reality studied than to the case study as a research method. Often it is not desirable to summarize and generalize case studies. Good studies should be read as narratives in their entirety'* (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 241).

Flyvbjerg (2006) revises these identified misunderstandings based on a thorough and critical review of the literature. His five revisions are fundamental to the current study.

- **The Case and IPA**

The IPA researcher begins with a detailed examination of one case until a certain level of gestalt has been achieved before moving onto the next, and so on through the corpus of selected cases (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA studies usually involve a small number of participants due to its aim of developing an ‘intimate portrayal of individual experience’ for each of them (Smith & Osborn, 2008a, p. 230). As far as possible, dynamic bracketing is employed for separating the findings for each case in order to remain committed to idiographic sensibility (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Separate sections on the selection of participants, phenomenological portraits, and bracketing follow at later stages of the study. Once a detailed analytical treatment of each case in the corpus is performed, and themes are identified, a cross-case search for patterns usually follows as themes are interrogated for convergence and divergence (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2011). Ultimately, the IPA research attempts to remain faithful to the individual by depicting the particular lifeworld of participants while, at the same time, unfolding more general themes (Eatough & Smith, 2006a).

3.2.4 IPA's Relationship with Language, Narratives, Identity, and Emotions

Rooted in the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions already discussed, IPA understands experience as unavoidably 'always already' interwoven with language and culture (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Essentially, cultures are frameworks for sense-making (Much, 1995), while peoples' interpretations of experience are permanently enabled, shaped, or limited by language because 'language is the house of Being' (Heidegger, 1998, p. 239). Individuals are, in Heidegger's words, *thrown* into a physical, social, and cultural world which precedes them and restricts their nature, actions, claims, and interpretations of experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Based on this, IPA research recognizes that understanding the experiential statements of the research participant involves an examination of the cultural position of the person (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Thus, understanding that 'whatever individuals report about their experience should be taken as *their interpretation of reality*' (Nicolson, 1986, cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 164), IPA analysis is used to reveal a person's subjective meaning-making positionality towards the object of investigation 'in their experience, their culture, language and locale' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 195). Critically, individuals' modes of engagement with a specific context or aspect of the world are not static or unitary, but diverse, complex and, sometimes, paradoxical or conflicting (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In the same line, Mead (1934, p. 140) proposes that, although individuals are *thrown into* and shaped by pre-existing socio-cultural forces, '[a]fter a self has arisen, it in a certain sense provides for itself its social experiences, and so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self. But it is impossible to conceive of a self-arising outside of social experience. When it has arisen we can think of a person in solitary

confinement for the rest of his life, but who still has himself as a companion, and is able to think and to converse with himself as he had communicated with others'. As can be seen, identity is one of the main concerns of IPA research, where Mead's conception of the self as both symbiotic and relational is highly relevant. 'The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoint of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved' (Mead, 1934, p. 138). Additionally, '[s]elves can only exist in definite relations to other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also' (Mead, 1934, p. 164). This perspective is echoed by Giddens (1991, p. 53) when stating: 'Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*. Identity here still presumes continuity across time and space: but self-identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent'.

Centrally concerned with aspects of sense-making, IPA research sees one's narration of own life story as a central marker of what it is to possess an identity and as a fundamental way of making meaning (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This resonates

with Bruner's and Brockmeier's perception of narrative as an interpretative meaning-making venture previously discussed in the literature review section. The vital connection between IPA, narrative, and identity is summarized by Eatough & Smith (2008, p. 185): 'When people tell stories of their lives, they are doing more than drawing on the culturally available stock of meanings. People may want to achieve a whole host of things with their talk such as save face, persuade and rationalize, but there is almost always more at stake and which transcends the specific local interaction. [...] Amongst other things it seems to us that our personal accounts are also concerned with human potential and development, with *making* our lives by connecting the past with the present and future'.

One fundamental aspect IPA researchers have to take into consideration when attempting to investigate human experience and intersubjective acts is that remembering and narrating of live events, especially sensitive events of pain and suffering, always carries a heavy emotional loading closely intertwined with one's cognition of the world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The potential of emotions to function as strong pointers to one's personal resonance of physiologically and culturally influenced entities is well described by Chodorow (1999, p. 165): 'Emotion words and emotional concepts must have individual resonance and personal meaning. Anger, shame, hope, fear, envy, love, and hate may be evoked in particular ways in different cultures and in reaction to culturally typical experiences, but these emotions are also evoked differently by different members of the culture and differently for the same member in different internal and external contexts. [...] That thoughts and feelings are entangled and that thoughts are thought in culturally specific languages - these ideas do not mean that there is no private feeling or that any particular thought has only a public cultural meaning. Culturally

recognizable thoughts or emotion terms can also be entwined in a web of thought-infused feelings and feeling-infused thoughts experienced by an individual as she creates her own psychic life within a set of interpersonal and cultural relations.’ Understanding IPA’s close relationship with language, narratives, identity, and emotions within the framework of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings discussed above and under the interpretivist umbrella invites the IPA researcher to conduct research through being both ‘empathic and questioning’ (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 36).

3.2.5 (Hermeneutic) Phenomenology in Tourism Studies: A Critical Update

In a 2010-issue of *Annals of Tourism Research*, Pernecky & Jamal published a thorough and constructive review of (hermeneutic) phenomenological attempts in tourism academia. The first part of the current section aims to present their findings, while the second part builds on their findings to critically analyze further developments in phenomenological research in tourism research post-2010.

Pernecky & Jamal (2010) notice that most of the phenomenological research in tourism has been ambiguous at best, despite an ever-growing interest in phenomenological approaches. Publications concerned with research methods in tourism tend to mention phenomenology either briefly (e.g. Jennings, 2001), or not at all (e.g. Ritchie, Burns, & Palmer, 2005). Pernecky & Jamal (2010) propose two significant challenges when employing phenomenology: its intricate and time-consuming nature involving sustained involvement by the researcher, and the lack of theoretical

understanding and clear methodological guidance in the limited number of studies which touched upon it (e.g. Cohen, 1979; Masberg & Silverman, 1996).

The first work identified by Pernecky & Jamal (2010) as explicitly using the concept of phenomenology in relation to tourism is Cohen's (1979) *Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences*. Starting from the distinction between individuals as tourists or pilgrims based on their self-relatedness to a cultural and spiritual 'center', Cohen provides a typology of five modes of tourist experience for which he provides neither theoretical justifications nor reference to the rich tradition of phenomenology. Similarly, Mannell & Iso-Ahola's (1987) three-dimensional exploration of the psychological nature of leisure and tourism experience, and Cohen, Nir, & Almagor's (1992) investigation in different angles of photography-based interactions between strangers and the inhabitants of a local community use the term phenomenology but fail to elaborate on the its philosophy and on its theoretical and practical application. Both Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai's (2002) questioning of the notion of backpacking as a distinct category of tourism, and Uriely & Belhassen's (2006) focus on drug-related tourist experience build on Cohen's (1979) aforementioned modes of experience and lack philosophical or theoretical considerations. Although briefly mentioning Husserl and Heidegger, Masberg & Silverman (1996) phenomenological approach to visitors' experience at heritage sites does not mention which phenomenological tradition it follows or reasoning for mixing aspects from both, and does not offer an explicit account of the methodology employed. In his commentary on issues in tourism research phenomenology, Szarycz (2009. p. 48) warns that tourism researchers are in danger of betraying the fundamental tenets of phenomenology since most previous work is based on a 'potpourri of ideas' where scholars do not stay true to

the philosophical underpinnings of specific phenomenologies. However, even Szarycz depicts phenomenology as a prescribed and static method and does not address the variety and flexibility of the phenomenological tradition. Recent works in the tourism field such as Ingram's (2002) investigation of motivations of farm tourism guests and hosts, Hayllar & Griffin's (2005) examination of the nature of the tourist experience in The Rocks historic precinct in Sydney, Australia, Curtin's (2006) exploration of the nature of swim-with-dolphins experience, Pernecky's phenomenological study of New Age tourists (2006), or Andriotis' (2009) phenomenological inquiry into visitors' experiences at sacred sites tend to draw method direction from Van Manen (1990) and / or Moustakas' (1994) and depict a generally positivistic, narrowly prescribed and descriptive phenomenology. Obenour (2004) claims to employ hermeneutics to construct an understanding of the significance of the journey to budget travelers, but his poorly-conceptualized methodological approach reflects neither Heidegger's nor Gadamer's hermeneutical understanding of phenomenology. Contrastingly, Pons (2003) provides a theoretically well-informed study of tourists' embodied experience of place by employing Heidegger's metaphorical concept of *dwelling* and other relevant contributions. The same Heideggerian metaphor of *dwelling* is used by Jamal & Stronza (2008) to inform their ecotourism-based research of cultural relationships in local-global spaces in the Peruvian Amazon. Reisinger & Steiner (2006a) survey tourism literature to reconceptualize object authenticity through a Heideggerian lens and propose the importance of aiming to understand the meanings object are infused with by the perceivers, as well as the relationships between these meanings and the social, cultural, and historical settings. In another paper, Reisinger & Steiner (2006b) aim to reconceptualize interpretation and offer

the example of Israeli tour guides to propose that Heideggerian interpreters' ability to draw upon their individual and cultural backgrounds enables them to develop richer interpretations. Ablett & Dyer (2009) build on the hermeneutic tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer, to provide a 'broader interpretation of interpretation' for heritage sites. Although lacking epistemological clarity, their study is essential in emphasizing the importance of language, tradition, history, inter-subjectivity, and social context to the interpretation of experience.

Having described Pernecky & Jamal's (2010) findings, the current research now turns to update these findings by critically reviewing phenomenological attempts in tourism academia post-2010.

Perhaps the most relevant paper to the current research is Rakić & Chambers' (2012) phenomenological attempt at rethinking tourism places as being simultaneously consumed and constructed at the point of visitation in a process which involves corporeal and multisensory aspects, but also cognitive and affective processes. Based on previous literature, the authors propose that places are socially constructed when invested with meaning. In order to explore this, they explicitly place their study in a hermeneutic interpretivist framework and thoroughly focus on the phenomenological concept of embodiment as bodily being-in-the-world. In terms of methodology, a multi-disciplinary approach of phenomenological methods, ethnography, and semiotics is used, although no reasoning is provided for this combination. Another well-documented phenomenological inquiry is van Winkle & Lagay's (2012) exploration of the learning experience which occurs during leisure tourism from the tourist's perspective. The authors build their

methodology based on the gaps identified by Pernecky & Jamal (2010) and explicitly adopt and explain the Husserlian essentialist phenomenological thought to identify six qualities of the tourism learning experience. In contrast, Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra (2013) provide a general understanding of phenomenology but fail to mention which branch of phenomenology their study of spirituality in the lived experience of an individual tourist falls within. Nevertheless, there are two major contributions of their study to the present research: the conceptualization of ‘phenomenological portrait’ and the multi-disciplinary view of the chosen topic they assume. Brown (2013) develops a conceptual paper where she draws upon Heideggerian phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism to draw a parallel between tourism and Heidegger’s concept of *Spielraum* with the purpose of analyzing whether or not her proposal according to which tourism is not just a substitute, but a catalyst for existential authenticity stands. However, the study is mainly descriptive, and no justification is given for combining Heidegger’s and Sartre’s phenomenologies. Fendt, Wilson, Jenkins, Dimmock, & Weeks (2014) embrace and properly conceptualize Heideggerian phenomenology to investigate the experiences of being surfer women. Their focus is identifying means of presenting phenomenological findings in ways that faithfully depict peoples’ experiences, and, in this regards, they propose that presenting the findings in the form of ‘postcards’ promotes individuality and gives voice to participants. Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology is also the main philosophical underpinning for Lindberg, Hansen, & Eide’s (2014) understanding of consumer experience within tourism as multirelational. More precisely, based on Heidegger’s being-in-the-world ontology, the authors propose consumers be situated ontologically in and across time, context, body, and interaction. Shim & Santos (2014)

base their study of tourists' experience in shopping malls on Relph's (1976) phenomenological distinction between *place* and *placelessness* but do not mention which phenomenological tradition has shaped their methodology. Another poorly conceptualized phenomenological methodology comes from Truong, Hall, & Garry's (2014) examination of perceptions and experiences of poor people in Sapa, Vietnam, regarding tourism as a means of poverty alleviation, where the only reference to the philosophical and theoretical principles of phenomenology is that they used 'a phenomenological approach that focuses on the lived experiences of members of the study communities' (p. 1075). On the other hand, a well-informed and properly conceptualized study is Malone, McCabe, & Smith's (2014) investigation into how hedonism is experienced and the connections between hedonic experiences and intentions for future ethical behavior in tourism. Their study explicitly adopts an interpretivist research approach and is of utmost importance to the current research as it introduces Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to the tourism field. The scholars provide a clear and informative explanation of the IPA philosophical underpinnings which further shape the employed methodology and subsequent analysis. Also very well-developed is Berdychevsky & Gibson's (2015) paper focused on young women's perceptions of sexual risk-taking in tourism and its consequences. The study's roots in transcendental phenomenology and the usage of specific concepts such as epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis are thoroughly explained and employed to reveal women's risk-taking in tourism as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. Also touching on the multi-dimensionality of the tourism experience is Jensen, Scarles, & Cohen (2015) innovative phenomenological exploration of InterRail mobilities. They

draw on Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian readings of phenomenology and combine the non-representational theory (NRT), embodiment, ethnography, and netnography to develop a multisensory phenomenology to analyze the role of rhythmscales, soundscapes, and thermalscales in tourism experiences. Marschall (2015) integrates phenomenology, auto-ethnography, and self-experimentation to propose personal memory as a generator of tourism. An important contribution to the present research is that she brings together, albeit rather tangential, the notions of memory, narrative, and identity, although she only offers a very brief and general description of the phenomenological stance adopted in her paper.

These updates to Pernecky & Jamal's (2010) critical review reveal a revitalization of the interest in phenomenology among tourism scholars, especially in the last two years. Interestingly, this seems to go hand in hand with an ever-increasing academic need for adopting innovative and multi-disciplinary approaches to research, although the current study argues that proper ontological and epistemological justifications have to be provided when employing such approaches to avoid falling into blatant relativism. Regarding methodology, there appears to still be a considerable number of researchers who do not build onto Pernecky & Jamal's (2010) identified literature gaps, while others are efficient and constructive in providing clear and in-depth explanations of their chosen phenomenological stance.

3.2.6 Conducting IPA

The current section details the practicalities of planning, conducting, and analyzing a research endeavor which involves IPA.

3.2.6.1 Selection and List of Participants




Following the idiographic tradition of IPA, the participants are selected *purposively*, based on the basis that they can provide relevant insights into a particular phenomenon under study. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) state that, usually, potential participants are contacted via *referral* (through different gatekeepers), *opportunities* (through one's own contacts), or *snowballing* (through referral by participants). This results in a 'fairly homogeneous sample, for whom the research question will be meaningful' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 49).




In particular, the participants for the current study are purposively selected based on their nationality – they are all born and raised in Romania – and their direct or indirect participation in the construction of place identity at the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance. Although homogenously brought together by nationality and by specific experiential factors, the participants belong to a variety of professional, educational, or age groups which enables the researcher to examine the psychological and socio-cultural variability within the group by analyzing the pattern of convergence and divergence which arises (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).




Being focused on quality, not quantity, and given the complexity of human experience and the detailed and time-consuming case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts, IPA studies are conducted on *small numbers of participants* (Smith & Osborn, 2008a; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). How small the sample should be ‘depends on: the degree of commitment to the case study level of analysis and reporting; the richness of the individual cases; and the organizational constraints one is operating under’ (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). A general rule of thumb the current study builds on is provided by Brocki & Wearden (2006). In the critical review of IPA studies, they identify participant numbers in most studies to vary *between one and thirty*. All in all, selecting the number of participants depends on the research questions and the expected volume and quality of data collected (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).




The final number of 24 cases for this study – 23 individual interviewees and one collective character – was achieved based on opportunities, referral, and snowballing techniques. Considering the fame and high social status of most interviewees, the researcher paid attention to their attendance in public events and attempted to engage them on such occasions. As all those approached were connected to the topic of Communist political repression one way or another, they were receptive to being interviewed at scheduled dates depending on their tight schedule. The Table 1 below provides the portrait image, the name, portrait number, and relevance to the study of each of the 24 participants.




Table 1: List of Participants



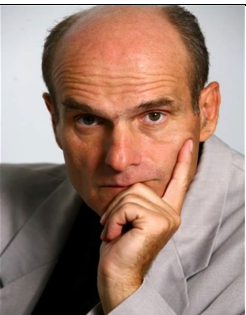
Portrait	Portrait #	Name	Relevance to Study
	1	Mr. Ion Iliescu	President of Romania (1990 – 1996; 2000 – 2004). Member of the Union of the Communist Youth since 1944. Member of the Communist Party of Romania from 1953 - where he was part of the Central Committee – until the Romanian Revolution in December 1989.
	2	Mr. Emil Constantinescu	President of Romania (1996-2000). Founding president of the Romanian Foundation for Democracy.
	3	Mr. Vasile Ciolpan	Commander of the Sighet Penitentiary (1950 – 1955).



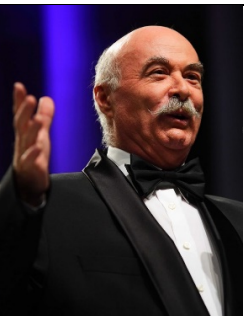
	4	Mrs. Trifoi	Wife of Mr. Grigore Trifoi, a former warden and chief of the section for political prisoners at the Sighet Penitentiary between 1953 and 1961.
	5	Mrs. Ana Blandiana	Founder of the Sighet Memorial Museum. President of the Civic Academy Foundation.
	6	Mr. Romulus Rusan	Director of the International Centre for Studies on Communism. Founder of the Sighet Memorial Museum.




	7	Mr. Robert Fürtös	Museum curator at the Sighet Memorial Museum. Historian and researcher in the archives of the former Securitate.
	8	Mr. Norbert Kondrat	Tour guide at the Sighet Memorial Museum.
	9	Mr. Ioan Ilban	Former political prisoner in the Sighet Prison (1948-1951), President of the Sighet Office of the Association of Former Political Prisoners in Romania (at present).

	10	Mr. Octav Bjoza	President of the Association of the Former Political Detainees in Romania. Former political prisoner (1958-1962).
	11	Mr. Radu Preda	Executive President of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER).
	12	Mr. Alin Mureșan	Founding President of the Centre for Studies in Contemporary History (CSCH). General Director of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER).

	13	Mr. Gheorghe Mihai Bârlea	Director of the Sighet Memorial Museum (2001-2007). Former member of the Communist Party before 1989. Founding member of the Civic Academy Foundation. Prefect of the Maramureș County (1997-2000). Senator in the Romanian Senate (2008-2012).
	14	Mr. Marius Voinaghi	History professor at the 'Dragoș Vodă' high-school in Sighet Marmăției.
	15	Mr. Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor	Dean of the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest (2004-2012). President of the Senate of the University of Bucharest (2011-2015). General director of the Diplomatic Institute of Romania (2005-2010, 2012). State Counsellor to President Emil Constantinescu (1998-2000). President of the Liberal Institute 'I.C. Brătianu' (2011-present).

	16	Mrs. Lucia Hossu-Longin	Producer of the 'Memorial of Suffering' TV series (120 episodes).
	17	Mrs. Ioana Hașu	Journalist for Radio France Internationale. Researcher of the Securitate Archives. Organizer of workshops and conferences on the anti-Communist resistance.
	18	Mr. Cristian Tudor-Popescu	Journalist (voted four times as Romania's best journalist and political analyst). Organizer of conferences on the topic of censorship under the Communist regime.

	19	Ms. Oana Stănciulescu	Journalist. Active participant in projects focused on the memory of former political prisoners under the Communist regime.
	20	Mr. Dan Puric	Leading Romanian artist. Organizer of and participant in events related to the memory of the victims of Communist totalitarianism in Romania.
	21	Mr. Tudor Gheorghe	Leading Romanian artist and intellectual figure with projects focused on the memory of the victims of Communist totalitarianism.

	22	Mr. Vasile Iusco	Archpriest of the Greek-Catholic Church in Sighetu Marmăției.
	23	Mr. Vasile Pop	Archpriest of the Orthodox Church in Sighetu Marmăției.
	24	The Visitor (collective)	The opinion books of the Sighet Memorial Museum detail visitors' experience with the museum interpretation.

3.2.6.2 *The Collective Character (The Visitor) and Idiography*

As mentioned, the present research took the somewhat unconventional decision of developing a collective character. Some may argue that creating a collective character goes against the idiographic pillar of IPA. However, IPA allows for and encourages methodological innovation and flexibility. Based on this, the current study builds on Freeman, Mathinson, & Wilcox's (2006, p.472) methodology of 'blending' different voices to create fictional characters. The fictional character created in the present research is The Visitor, which is comprised of a multitude of messages drawn from the visitor opinion books of the Sighet Memorial Museum. 'This provided a way to represent a variety of points of view while retaining a >>voice<< for their shared concerns and response' (Freeman *et al.*, 2006, p. 472). The opinion books represent the answer to the main question of the study: *What does the Sighet Memorial Museum mean to you?* All the opinion books for the period 1997-2016 were photographed with the permission of the museum authorities, and these photographs allowed for their subsequent sustained and thorough analysis. Rather than interviewing several visitors, analyzing the opinions provided in these books at the end of the visiting experience is presumed to portray a balanced and comprehensive image of visitors' perceptions and of the way meanings are attributed. Remaining faithful to the declared target group, only opinions written in Romanian language and signed with Romanian names were taken into account. Based on these considerations, the present study argues that the collective character called The Visitor does not deter the idiographic focus of IPA. It enriches it in an alternative and innovative manner while supporting the other - phenomenological and hermeneutic - pillars of IPA.

3.2.6.3 *Semi-structured In-depth Interviews*

In-depth interviews are well suited for IPA studies as they invite participants to provide ‘a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences [...] They facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon’, while the participants are provided with the opportunity ‘to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length’ (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 56). Taking this factors into consideration, the current study employs the following definition of in-depth interviews: *‘repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informant’s perspectives on their lives, experiences or situation as expressed in their own words’* (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 77).

A series of underlining assumptions in using in-depth interviews highly relevant to the present research are provided by Johnson (2002). First of all, in-depth interviewing is empathic to the respondents’ worldview and contextualizes this worldview by considering societal and cultural influences. In this regard, in-depth interviewing ‘begins with common sense perceptions, explanations, and understandings of some lived cultural experience [...] and aims to explore the contextual boundaries of that experience or perception, to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view or reflection or to penetrate to more reflective understandings about the nature of that experience (Johnson, 2002, p. 106). Second of all, the topic under investigation should be meaningful and beneficial to both the subject and researcher. Third of all, in-depth interviews have the potential of developing a holistic picture of the explored phenomenon.

The latter aspect is closely linked to one of the main benefits for using semi-structured interviewing: due to its versatility, this approach to collecting data can reveal a deep understanding of the research question by exploring varied and sometimes contradicting or conflicting aspects within participants' accounts (Fynal, 2005). Thus, the following definition of semi-structured interviews is adopted: 'semi-structured interviews are merely conversations in which you know what you want to find out about – and so have a set of questions to ask and a good idea of what topics will be covered – but the conversation is free to vary, and is likely to change substantially between participants (Fynal, 2005, p. 65). The purpose is informed by a research question, which, in turn, is usually inclined towards the abstract level and cannot be addressed directly to the participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As mentioned, this research question is: *How do memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction connect towards creating meaningful experiences at sites of dark memories?* Semi-structured interviewing allows the research question to be answered through a subsequent analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Semi-structured interviews also provide a more appropriate format for discussing sensitive topics, through enabling the researcher to talk through the topic with the participant, follow up matters arising during the discussion, and answer questions in real time (Fynal, 2005).

Due to the nature of the present research but also to biological aspects, the live interviewing of the former prison commander at the Sighet Penitentiary was not possible. In this case, the interpretation is based on secondary data, more precisely on the video interview obtained by Mrs. Lucia Hossu-Longin for the 'Memorial of Suffering' TV

series. This remains the only interview anyone has managed to conduct with Mr. Vasile Ciolpan.

3.2.6.4 Scheduling the Semi-structured Interview

Developing an interview schedule facilitates a comfortable interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, which, in turn, invites the participants to provide detailed accounts of the experience under investigation as their level of comfort increases (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The researcher should take into consideration that interviews tend to alternate between narrative or descriptive sequences, and analytic or interpretative ones (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

As the verbal input of the researcher should be minimal, the current study understands the importance of using *open questions* which encourage the participant to talk at length. Importantly, such open questions should ‘not make too many assumptions about the participant’s experiences or concerns, or lead them towards particular answers’ (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 60). Also, the current study follows Smith, Flowers, & Larkin’s (2009) advice of scheduling between six and ten open questions, as this range tends to occupy 45-90 minutes. The scheduled set of questions should not answer the research questions themselves but enable to the researcher to answer the through interpretative analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

For the purpose of the present study, the questions were aimed at exploring participants’ identity *with* the Sighet Memorial Museum. The participants were informed about the general topic of investigation – the history of the Communist repression in

Romania in general and the repression at the Sighet Penitentiary in particular – from the beginning of the interview. This way, it is critically assumed their replies to the open questions and, thus, their attribution of meaning are not random and free-floating but take place under the umbrella of the investigated topic. One such question is *Who is [participant's name]?* No other information – such as the professional or social status of the respondent such as ‘President’ or ‘Professor’ – are included in the question to not direct the reply to such paths. Another question is, *Have you visited the Sighet Memorial Museum?*, usually followed by *What is your opinion of the Sighet Memorial Museum / museal interpretation?* In the spirit of the IPA tradition, the main interview question is: *What does the Sighet Memorial mean to you?* Considering most of the interviewees are very important Romanian personalities – including two former presidents of the state – some of the open questions were preceded by statements confirming the researcher’s awareness about the participants’ relevant initiatives. For example, President Emil Constantinescu was asked: *‘I read about your >>Wings<< and Jilava projects dedicated to the memory of the former political prisoners in Romania. Please tell me about these projects.’* Linked to this, another question followed: *‘According to your public statements, these projects are aimed at educating Romanians about the history of Communist repression and anti-Communist resistance. Why do you believe such an education is important?’* Yet another followup question was: *‘I read on your website that you plan to develop a research and educational center at the former Jilava Penitentiary purposefully targeted at the high-school students and educators. Why do you believe it is important for the Romanian youth to know this history?’* Considering the prestige and high social status of the participants, prior research about their relevant activities was needed. The

personalized questions resulting from the researcher's interest in their activity presumably raised the level of trust which encouraged them to open up and provide detailed narratives. This is ever-so-important considering the sensitivity of the topic. Although a set of possible personalized questions was prepared for each participant, the researcher encouraged a free discussion and almost never interrupted the interviewees' narrative under the presumption that he or she would narrate aspects perceived as important to the general topic under investigation.

3.2.6.5 Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Privacy

The issues of consent, confidentiality, and privacy are fundamental to any interviewing endeavor, and should be taken into consideration at all stages of the research process. Before the commencement of each interview, the participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and requested to sign an informed consent form. Reassurance that they can choose not to answer questions or end the interview at any stage was also provided. The participants were also guaranteed the privacy of collected data and that this data is to be used solely for the purposes of the study. Their acceptance of being audio recorded stands as their acceptance of being part of the study. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and the high social status of most of the participants, most of them demanded copies of the recorded audio materials. They all accepted their identities to be disclosed in the study.

3.2.6.6 Interview Transcriptions

Although the norm for IPA interviewing is audio-recording, it also requires *verbatim* transcriptions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). However, since the aim of the IPA analysis is to interpret the meaning of the *content* of the participant's account, it does not require a particularly detailed transcription of the exact length of pauses or all non-verbal utterance (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA generally requires a semantic record of the interview, including all the words spoken by everyone who is present, and notes of *notable* utterances (for example laughter), significant pauses, and hesitations (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For the current study, the organizing, coding, and analysis of interview transcriptions were conducted by the researcher on an individual case-by-case basis following the guide below.

3.2.6.7 Analysis of Emergent Themes

As already mentioned, the IPA is characterized by a set of standard processes (e.g. moving from the descriptive to the interpretive, and from the individual to the shared) and principles (eg. a commitment to understanding personal meaning-making in specific contexts) which call for analytical flexibility (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Thus, IPA analysis is iterative, inductive, fluid, and emergent (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Although there is not a particular 'prescribed' or 'correct' method of data analysis in IPA research, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) provide a useful step-by-step guide for novices which is graphically depicted in Figure 3.

Step 1 – *Reading and re-reading* – invites the researcher to immerse oneself in the original data, which usually is in the form of first written verbatim interview transcripts. Repeated reading of the transcripts is assumed to facilitate the process of entering the participant's world, and of understanding how narratives bind sections of the interview together.

Step 2 – *Initial noting* – involves the free association and exploration of semantic content and language use on a very exploratory level. While moving through the transcript, the researcher engages in analytical dialogue with each line of the transcript by annotating it with *descriptive* (describing what the participant has said), *linguistic* (exploring the specific use of language), and *conceptual* (engaging at a more interrogative, interpretive, and conceptual level) comments.

Step 3 – *Developing emergent themes* – requires the researcher to break up the narrative flow of the interview and focus on discrete chunks of transcript in the process of identifying themes. This step revolves around the concept of hermeneutic circle, as the chunks of transcript and emergent themes are unavoidably interpreted in relation to the whole text, while the text is interpreted in relation to its parts.

Step 4 – *Searching for connections across emergent themes* – involves the charting, or mapping, of how the most critical emergent themes to the research question fit together. Two useful ways of identifying patterns between emergent themes are abstraction and function. Abstraction 'involves putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster' which 'can be called a "super-ordinate" theme' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 96). Function refers to emergent themes being inspected for

their specific function within the transcript, for example, ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 98).

Step 5 – *Moving to the next case* – acknowledges the importance of bracketing the ideas arising from the analysis of the first case when moving to the next participant’s transcript and repeating the process. As the research progresses, the preconceptions of the researcher about the investigated topic will most likely have changed. However, by rigorously and systematically following the outlined steps, one should ensure that the individuality of each case is respected.

Step 6 – *Looking for patterns across cases* – invites the researcher to creatively seek for convergences and divergences across cases, but also for idiosyncratic instanced and shared higher order qualities.

Step 7 – *Taking interpretation to deeper levels* – proposes the deepening of analysis by employing metaphors and temporal referents, and by linking the emergent themes and patterns to other relevant theories. This is rooted in the concept of hermeneutic circle and the acknowledgment that different levels of interpretation are possible to co-exist.

The current study adopts this seven-step approach developed by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009): steps 1-4 are used to develop individual phenomenological portraits for each participant, while steps 5-7 are used to seek patterns and conduct critical interpretations.

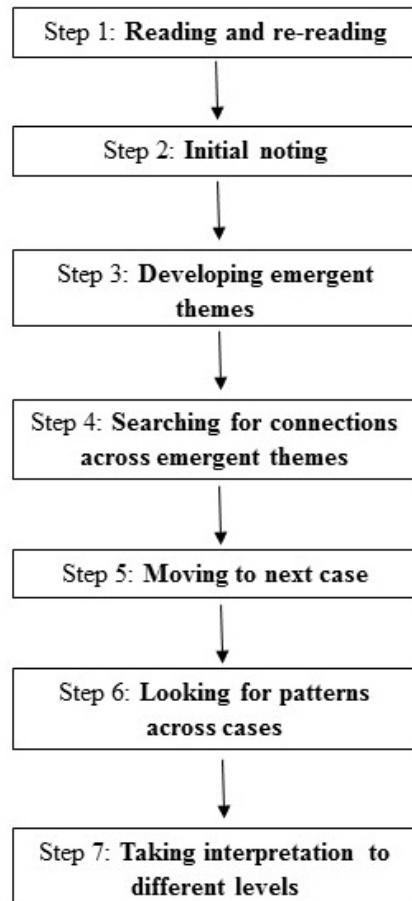


Figure 3 : Step-by-Step Guide for IPA Analysis
(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009)

3.2.6.8 Writing the IPA Analysis: Phenomenological Portraits

There is not a single right way of writing up an IPA analysis. Instead, writing is a creative process where the participant's and interpreter's voices meet in the hermeneutic (co)construction of the account. Fundamentally, the results of the analysis are presented as a clear and full narrative account of what has been learned about the participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The current study favors an idiographic presentation which prioritizes the participant, and themes for each case are presented together. Having already

argued the importance of the case to IPA research, the current study refers to such cases as '*phenomenological portraits*'. Following the idiographic tradition of IPA, an individual phenomenological portrait is sketched for each participant.

Developed as a research concept rooted in Husserlian phenomenological thought (Moustakas, 1994), there is a surprising scarcity of studies explicitly employing phenomenological portraits. Most of these papers investigate identitarian aspects linked to medical and health psychology. For example, in their phenomenological investigation of psychosocial maturity among adolescent boys, Josselson, Greenberger, & McConochie (1977) clearly state that a phenomenological portrait was written for each subject, emerging themes were identified, followed by a cross-portrait analysis aimed at identifying thematic convergence or divergence. This process is identical to the IPA idiographic case analysis approach previously described. Although linked to the philosophical approach of deconstruction, the conceptualization of phenomenological portrait offered by Schrag (1997, p. 228) is a good reflection of how the concept is understood in the current study: 'The portrait of the phenomenological subject that I propose to recover is admittedly a significantly refigured portrait. It is no longer a portrait of a universal and disembodied transcendental ego, abstracted from the concrete discursive and cultural practices that make up the fabric of human life. Its new figuration includes the effects of language and social institutions in its very constitution. The recovered subject is a speaking, acting, embodied, and socialized subject that remains irreducible to any one of its manifold attributes and functions. The principal phenomenological feature that continues to characterize the subject [...] is its responsivity within the dynamics of experience. As life-experiencing subject, the phenomenological

subject is textured by its lived-through responses to prior discourse and prior action upon it’.

A recent phenomenological analysis of the connection between tourism and spirituality conducted by Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra (2013) brought the concept of phenomenological portrait to the field of tourism. To the present, it remains the only study to have touched upon this notion in the tourism academia. The current study adopts Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra’s (2013, p. 157) definition of the phenomenological portrait as a *‘personal narrative of the individual that seeks to encapsulate their life, who they are and what is important to them, and the personal/spiritual meaning associated’ with the main themes under investigation*. The decision to depict each participant’s rich story as a unique portrait stems from the acknowledgement that presenting only common themes emerging from the data would go against the fundamental phenomenological principle of giving voice to the individual (Crotty, 1996; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013). Phenomenological researchers should aim at producing a report which ‘is a systematic, rigorous search for truth, but does not kill off all its touches’ (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. xiii), and enables complex phenomena to reveal themselves naturally in ways which are personally meaningful to individuals (Willis, 2001; Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013). Obtaining a rich and emic understanding of the reflective world of the individual requires a strong rapport to be built between the researcher and each participant based on trust and empathy (Moran, 2000). This strong rapport enables the researcher to acknowledge and empathize with individuals having difficulties describing complex experiences verbally, and, consequently, allow them to unfold their

life narratives in other ways which hold personal meaning (Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013).

All in all, 'an IPA narrative represents a dialogue between participants and researcher, and that is reflected in the interweaving of analytic commentary and raw extracts' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 110). Each portrait is usually introduced and framed by background demographic data and description of participant aimed at locating the 'voice behind the story' (Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013, p. 158). However, the decision was made in this study to only frame each portrait by mentioning the participant's relevance to the study. This is to allow participants to make sense of their own demographic data under the presumption they will provide only those data they perceive as important to the investigated topic. Each portrait includes emergent themes always backed up with evidence from the participant's transcript. Ultimately, the richness and intimacy of phenomenological portraits revolve around what Yerushalmi (2012) metaphorically calls 'vehicles of memory', while the success of the phenomenological attempt lies in the researcher's ability to enable each participant to delve deep into their autobiographical memory and articulate meaningful life narratives. In the spirit of idiography and richness of interpretation, the transcribed replies were used almost entirely. Since the purpose is to give voice to each participant, each portrait contains large bodies of narrative text alongside the researcher's interpretation. This narrative text is generally left uncut, as it is assumed the order and density of statements, as well as the choice of words and tone in different moments can expose perceptions and reveal means and themes for attributing meaning to the investigated topic.

The present research takes into consideration Smith, Flowers, & Larkin's (2009) warning that way too often novice qualitative researchers tend to provide rather descriptive scripts and ignore the hermeneutic analysis from the researcher. Based on this, each portrait includes both the participant's meaning-making and the researcher's interpretation of the participant's meaning-making. Also, once individual phenomenological portraits have been written for each participant, a separate section exploring patterns across portraits follows.

3.2.6.9 Contextualizing IPA

Of significant importance to the current study is Smith, Flowers, & Larkin's (2009) advice that a beneficial way of exploring connections between and across emergent themes is to contextualize the narrative accounts. 'Attending to temporal, cultural and narrative themes in a proactive manner', Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009, p. 98) argue, 'is useful as they frame many of the more local understandings presented within an interview'. They go on to propose that 'participant observation can be helpful for understanding particular local contexts and activities, and the sampling of media representations can be a way of further exploring the available cultural resources for making sense of the topic in hand' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 73). Additional data sources such as secondary data and documents can provide valuable support in contextualizing IPA analysis. More specifically, the present study adopts different means for contextualizing the IPA analysis, such as relevant secondary sources and theories. However, the main contextualizing approach employed by the current research is

participant observation. This is used to conduct a semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum and seek for elements of Romanianness and Romanian Common Knowledge which may frame and influence individual perceptions of the chosen site. Since the purpose of the semiotic reading is to frame, complement, and enrich the double hermeneutics of the IPA analysis, the semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum represents the first section of the ‘Analysis’ chapter of this thesis. A thorough discussion of the Peircean semiotic theory of signs follows below.

3.3 Peircean Semiotics: Theory of Signs

As it has already been mentioned, the Peircean semiotic theory of signs is used in the current research with the purpose of contextualizing and complementing the IPA research. Place identity has been defined as a combination between identity *with* place and identity *of* place. If IPA is adopted to investigate the former identitarian aspect, the Peircean semiotic theory of signs is employed to explore the latter one. Three aspects of Peirce’s theory are highly relevant to the present study. Firstly, it is Peirce’s tripartite conceptualization of a ‘sign’ as object-representamen-interpretant. Secondly, it is his concept of ‘collateral knowledge’ which refers to shared memory that adds certain levels of commonality among individuals interpretations of texts or places. As the purpose of the semiotic reading is to seek for elements of transgenerational collective memory, it is assumed that Romanianness acts as the meaning-infusing collateral knowledge at the Sighet Memorial. Thirdly, it is the relationship between sign and object, where the sign acts as icon, index, or symbol. Presumed as rooted in Romanianness, it is these iconical,

indexical, and symbolic functions that form the basis for the semiotic reading of the chosen dark heritage site.

Simplistically perceived as the study of signs, semiotics (from the Greek *semeíon*, 'sign') is generally associated to the research of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914).

3.3.1 Saussurean Semiotics – A Critique

Although many tourism studies have previously employed semiotics, most of them have chosen a Saussurean approach, based on the symbolic nature of linguistic signs (e.g. Culler, 1981; Urry, 1990; Frow, 1991; Tresidder, 2011). Saussure's 'sign' is the result of the arbitrary relationship between a 'signifier' (*signifiant*, the form which the sign takes), and the 'signified' (*signifié*, the concept it represents) (Saussure, 1983). This model has been criticized for 'neglecting entirely the things for which signs stand' (Ogden & Richards, 1923, p. 8), and for being detached from social context (Gardiner, 1992). The rigidity of Saussure's structuralist model makes it better suited to 'explain closed systems of language, rather than the interaction between mind and the physical world' (Metro-Roland, 2009, p. 271).

3.3.2 Peircean Semiotics – The Way Forward

Scholars are beginning to agree that Peirce's theory of signs is more appropriate for analyzing the relationship between the world and people's understanding of it and for

interpreting the meanings of non-linguistic signs such as memorial landscapes (MacCannell, 1999; Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007; Metro-Roland, 2009; French, 2012). As Smith (2002, cited in Metro-Roland, 2011a, p. 12) states: ‘What Peirce has to say about interpretation is important and can offer a robust theory for explaining landscape interpretation, for explaining the way in which we encounter and accommodate that which is “other” than ourselves’. The relevance of Peirce’s theory to the tourism research in general and to the current study in particular is reconfirmed by Metro-Roland (2011b, p. 36), who argues: ‘Peirce’s theory accounts for both the mental and the physical, the material and the spiritual, which constitutes the tourist experience giving order and meaning to the world around’. Metro-Roland (2011a) introduces three relevant concepts from Peircean semiotics related explicitly to the issue of interpreting meaningful landscapes, and it is these concepts that the current semiotic reading focuses on.

3.3.2.1 The Peircean Tripartite ‘Sign’: Object, Representamen, Interpretant

The first concept is Peirce’s notion of ‘sign’ as a tripartite system composed of: an object, a representamen, and the interpretant.

Peirce defines a Representamen ‘as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect is called its Interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former’ (EP 2.478)¹.

¹ The customary practice for citing Peirce’s writings: EP (Essential Peirce) and CP (Collected Paper) followed by volume and page number; SS (Semiotic and Significs) followed by page number.

Chandler (2014) exemplifies this model by analyzing the components of the traffic light sign for 'stop': a red light facing traffic at an intersection (the object); the seeing and cognition that it is a red light (the representamen); vehicles halting in order to avoid accidents (the interpretant).

The Object is divided between the immediate object (what is put into play in semiosis) and dynamical object (what it is). For example, the representation of the Empire State Building in a photo is the immediate object while the actual building is the dynamical object (Metro-Roland, 2011a). An empirical exploration of the building itself does not necessarily mean gaining access to the dynamical object since people's cognition of the world external to themselves is always mediated through the sign. As Bergman (2002, p. 3) writes: 'Peirce declares that there is no such thing as an absolute empirical datum; an experience, no matter how simple, is always a sign rendered comprehensible by its position in a cognitive flow. There is no pure experience of something as black, because blackness is something that is associated with a thing in understanding; and such an attribution is a complex semiotic act, performed mostly without control, but always against the setting of a wider semiotic background'.

The Interpretant is usually understood as the meaning given to the representamen and takes the form of another thought or action. To clarify the concept, Peirce offers three facets of interpretation: the immediate interpretant ('the interpretant represented or signified in the sign'), the dynamical interpretant ('the effect actually produced on the mind'), and the final interpretant ('the effect that would be produced on the mind by the sign after sufficient development of thought') (EP 2.478). Perceiving it as the main

difference between the Saussurean and Peircean semiotics, Metro-Roland (2011a) offers a detailed explanation of this interpretative triad by using the example of a pictogram posted in a foreign city. People's recognition of it as a sign transmitting information constitutes the immediate interpretant. The actual interpretation of a sign in a time and in a place, in the form of a thought, an utterance, an action or all of these, constitutes the dynamical interpretant. Metro-Roland (2011a, p. 15) quotes Nathan Houser's 1992 analysis of Peirce's theory: 'The interpretant is, or helps makeup, a habit that >>guides<< our future (and present) actions or thought with respect to the object in question, or objects like the one in question'. The final interpretant depends upon the community of enquirers over space and time, and it does not consist in the way in which any mind does act but in the way in which every mind would act. 'That is, it consists in a truth which might be expressed in a conditional proposition of this type: 'If so and so were to happen to any mind, this sign would determine that mind to such and such conduct'' (EP 2.499).

Thus, a vital idea behind Peircean semiotics is that individuals apprehend the world through interpreting signs and that nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign.

3.3.2.2 Collateral Knowledge

The second concept is the relationship between collateral observation or knowledge, habit, and beliefs. Within any act of semiosis, interpretation depends upon the outside knowledge and beliefs brought to fill in the details (EP 2.493-6). Peirce defines collateral knowledge as 'previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes' (EP 2.494). It is the storehouse of cumulated knowledge gained from previous semiotic acts and

accessed consciously or not when encountering a sign. In fact, Metro-Roland (2011a) argues that the backbone of collateral knowledge is developed in early childhood and it is against this background that further sign interpretation is performed. The interaction between the interpretant and the collateral information leads to the accretion of meaning, the denotation, and connotation of a sign. Eco (1976, p. 16) exemplifies this when writing: '[i]f a sign ought to be directly compared to its object, intended in an extensional way, no metaphor would be possible. To call Achilles a lion means nothing if you compare Achilles to a given token lion or even to the class of all lions. The metaphor works only because among the interpretants of the word lion there are concepts of >>courage<< and >>fierceness<<. In a world without interpretants a sickle and hammer would only mean a sickle crossed with a hammer. And Leonardo's Last Supper would only be a very gloomy dinner or a meeting between thirteen unshaven men'. Thus, the more collateral knowledge brought to bear on the process of interpretation, the closer one can get to the dynamical object of the sign. The set of beliefs about the world individuals carry with them shape their actions. As Peirce writes: 'The essence of belief is the establishment of habit' (CP 5: 398). An important aspect to keep in mind is that Peirce has insisted on the communal nature of knowledge which he refers to as *commens*. For example, even if cultural landscapes are open to multiple interpretations, 'each visitor to a cultural landscape within a community of inquiry introduces a certain commonality to these individualistic meanings' (Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007, p. 229).

3.3.2.3 *The Relationship Sign - Object: Sign as Icon, Index, Symbol*

The third concept is the relationship of the sign to its dynamical object. Under the Peircean semiotics, a sign is determined by its dynamical object in three ways. An *icon* is a sign related to its object through resemblance or shared quality, and examples of icons include a map, a painting, a diagram, the feeling evoked by a piece of music, if it invokes what the composer intended (CP 8.335; EP 1.226; EP 2.5). The connotative function of signs is highlighted by Peirce when stating that ‘an icon is a sign fit to be used as such because it possesses the quality signified’ (EP 2.307). An *index* relates to its object by actual or physical connection to it, or by being in ‘a real relation to it’, and examples include the hands of a clock, a photograph, a knock on the door, landmarks (CP 2.304; CP 4.447; EP 2.163; EP 2.274). A *symbol* bears no resemblance to its object but is linked to it through a ‘habit, disposition or rule’, which, in turn, is a convention among the members of a community (CP 4.447). This is reinforced by Gadamer (1989), who argues that individuals understand the surrounding world through a horizon of meaning which is socially and culturally shaped by the linguistic community they belong to. Peirce proposes that very few signs are pure icons, indices or symbols, so, rather than focusing on signs’ ontological status, what matters is the way in which they function iconically, indexically and/or symbolically (EP 2.10). Metro-Roland (2011a) concludes - albeit conceptually - that it is this elasticity which makes Peircean semiotics useful towards understanding the connection between cultural landscape and tourist experience. The upcoming semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Romania builds on Metro-Roland’s (2011a) argument and focuses on the iconical, indexical, and symbolical functions of signs.

3.3.2.4 Peircean Semiotics in Tourism Studies

In tourism research, semiotic approaches resembling Peircean semiotics have mostly been used in the context of marketing and branding, in studies such as Uzzell (1984), Cohen (1989), Cooper (1994), Selwyn (1996), Dann (1996), or Hunter (2016). Such approaches usually present a tripartite system which mirrors the Peircean sign: an advertisement of a tourism product (the object), symbols and myths attached to the respective product (the representamen), the consumption of the tourism product (the interpretant).

Scholarly works such as MacCannell (1999, 2014), Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland (2007), Knudsen, Rickly, & Metro-Roland (2016), Metro-Roland (2009, 2011a, 2011b) French (2012), and Lau (2011, 2014) are fundamental in deciphering Peirce's complex writing, and in introducing concepts such as 'collateral knowledge' and the 'Peircean sign' to the tourism academia. They propose the potential of Peircean semiotics for exploring the tourist experience in cultural landscapes, but their attempts remain mostly conceptual. Very few attempts have been made to develop practical methodologies for applying Peirce's concepts in experiential research. One such attempt is Soica (2016) who develops a practical semiotic framework for investigating how meanings are attached to objects by different actors in the ecotourism practice. This is an important practical development towards actively bringing Peirce's semiotics in the field of tourism research, but it presents a one-way meaning-making process: from the actors to the objects. The major innovation of the current study is proposing the 'collateral knowledge' as a set of values and beliefs which form the shared identitarian core for most individuals in a

cultural group. In so doing, it develops a methodology of reading signs through the lens of ‘collateral knowledge’ which enables researchers to draw critical conclusions on a two-way meaning-making process: actors attributing meanings to heritage objects which, in turn, influence the visiting experience and transform the visitors’ personality.

3.3.3 Conducting Semiotic Reading

The current section details the practical aspects of planning, conducting, and analyzing a research endeavor which involves Peircean semiotics.

3.3.3.1 Participant Observation

The method used for conducting the semiotic reading - participant observation – is almost universally accepted as the central research method in cultural anthropology. Spradley (1980) refers to participant observation as a general approach to fieldwork in ethnographic research, while Agar (1996) understands it as an umbrella term for all of the observation and interviewing conducted by anthropologists. Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte (1999, p. 91) define participant observation as ‘the starting point in ethnographic research’, but also as ‘the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting’. Bernard (2011, p. 2) sees it as a ‘strategic method’ comprised of several elements which can be conveniently chosen based on the question beings asked. The current study perceives these definitions to be too broad and adopts DeWalt & DeWalt’s (2011, p. 2)

narrower definition of participant observation as a qualitative research method used ‘to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied’. Evans (1988) argues that participant observation facilitates the researcher’s involvement in the action, allowing him to gain an understanding from the inside while still retaining an outsider’s empirical attention to detail. Quoting Scott & Usher (1999), Stone (2012b) argues that participant observation has a ‘direct experiential value’ by providing opportunities to inductively gain insights into the behavior of people while they consume dark tourism products in dark heritage places.

Practically, one month was spent in the city of Sighet, out of which one week was dedicated to the semiotic reading proper and the collection of rich data which allowed for the subsequent analysis. The rest of the time included the planning and conducting of interviews, as well as further visitations of the museum.

3.3.3.2 Level of Involvement – Spradley’s Continuum of Participation

DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) acknowledge the importance of recognizing participant observation as a combination of two slightly different processes. In the same vein, Bernard (2011) proposes that participant observation should be distinguished from both pure observation and pure participation. On the one hand, ‘pure observation’, DeWalt & DeWalt (2011, p. 21) state, ‘seeks, to the maximum extent possible, to remove the researcher from the actions and behaviors so that they are unable to influence them’. On the other hand, DeWalt & DeWalt (2011, p. 22) define pure participation as ‘going

native’, and this happens ‘when a researcher sheds the identity of investigator and adopts the identity of a full participant in the culture’.

Having reviewed the two extremes of research involvement, DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) propose that successful researchers tend to employ a wide diversity of approaches which range between pure observation and pure participation. In this regard, it becomes essential to review Spradley’s (1980) continuum of the researchers’ degree of participation, ranging from non-participation to complete participation. *Non-participation* involves acquiring cultural knowledge by observing phenomena from outside the research setting, for example by studying texts or watching television. *Passive participation* occurs when the researcher is at the scene of action, but does not interact with people and, rather, assumes the role of a pure observer or spectator. *Moderate participation* happens when the researcher is on site, is identifiable as a researcher, but the active participation is very limited or inexistent. *Active participation* invites the researcher to almost completely engage in peoples’ activities with the aim of learning the cultural rules and behaviors. *Complete participation* involves a temporary suspension of other roles so that the researcher can become a member of the group being studied to be as fully integrated with the phenomenon as possible.

Following Spradley’s (1980) scale of participation, the semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum was conducted under *moderate participation*. This level involves a balanced approach between being an ‘insider’ (participant) and an ‘outsider’ (observer), and this combination of involvement and detachment is presumed to ensure a more systematic and balanced interpretive process (DeWalt, DeWalt, & Wayland, 1998).

3.3.3.3 *Types of Data Collected*

In accordance with Polit & Hungler (1987), the main type of data collected for the current research was broad, analytic, and interpretive field notes. These were recorded systematically in a verbal way (into an audio recorder) and/or in a written form. Baker (2006) identifies four categories of field notes: observational, method, theory, and personal. *Observational notes* explain what the researcher actually saw, while *method notes* detail strategies which were ‘employed or that might be employed’ in future observation activities (Chapman, 1992, cited in Baker, 2006, p. 183). *Personal notes* are understood as the researcher’s ‘own feelings during the research process’ and *theoretical notes* as ‘interpretative attempts to attach meaning to observations’ (Polit & Hungler, 1987, p. 272). Field notes taken during an event are the *condensed version*, while their post-event elaboration is the expanded version (Spradley, 1980). Thus, ‘raw field notes’ are taken in order ‘to prompt the memory later’ (Hatch, 2002, p. 82).

The success of an observational study lies in the quality of the collected data and field notes Polit & Hungler (1987), and this quality, according to Spradley (1980), depends on three principles. First of all, the researcher should ‘identify the language used for each fieldnote entry’, use ‘parentheses, quotation marks, or brackets’ in order to have a record which ‘reflects the same differences in language usages as the actual field situation’ (Spradley, 1980, p. 66). Second of all, the researcher should distinguish between ‘native terms’ and ‘observer terms’ (Spradley, 1980, p. 67). Third of all, researchers should use ‘concrete language’ when describing observations, not generalize or

abbreviate, but ‘expand, fill out, enlarge, and give as much specific detail as possible’ (Spradley, 1980, p. 68).

The current study uses a variety of data to support the field notes, and facilitate and enhance the subsequent analysis. *Audio recordings* are an alternative to written field notes. *Photography* is used to back up, exemplify, and enrich the semiotic reading. According to Collier Jr. & Collier (1986), cameras have the potential to help researchers ‘see more and with greater accuracy’ (p. 5) as they are an ‘instrumental extension of our senses’ (p. 7). Other materials such as *a virtual museum tour, museum brochures, leaflets, or archive documents* are adopted as supportive documents which can expand the researcher’s understanding of the chosen site of dark heritage. Taking on the advice of Spradley (1980) and Given & Leckie (2003), *maps* were developed to record observations of the narrative flow at the Sighet Memorial Museum.

3.3.3.4 Writing the Semiotic Analysis

Supported by the wide range of collected data, and building on the work of Rickly-Boyd (2010), the writing of the semiotic reading was done in the form of a full narrative. As already mentioned in the literature review, the official narrative of a heritage site involves a combination of historical chronology and thematic narratives (Azaryahu & Foote, 2008). In other words, (dark) heritage sites tend to display an official master narrative, which is comprised of a series of thematic sub-narratives arranged according to a particular chronology. The current study proposes that mapping this official master narrative and its components before writing the semiotic analysis can ensure a coherent

writing process. Once a narrative map is developed, the hermeneutic circle allows the researcher to write the semiotic analysis on different levels of interpretation. For example, the materiality of the entire memorial complex can be read based on the official master narrative, while the master narrative can be read according to the physical features of the site. Also, the master narrative can be read based on its thematic sub-narratives, which, in turn, can be read according to the master narrative. This two-way reading process is also valid for the relationship between the thematic sub-narratives and the individual elements which comprise each of them. Thus, *the writing of the semiotic analysis was done in the form of a full narrative and is rooted in the concept of hermeneutic circle.*

3.4 Bracketing Biases

Bracketing is an important consideration in order to reduce the possibility of imposing researcher's biases on the research endeavor. The current study adopts an interpretivist approach to bracketing – bracketing *in* biases – whose details are presented below.

3.4.1 Husserlian Bracketing

Bracketing is a notion which can be traced back to Husserlian phenomenology. Conceptually, it involves holding a phenomenon up for inspection while suspending presuppositions and evading interpretations (Giorgi, 1985; Ashworth, 1999). According to Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz (1991, p. 50), '[b]racketing requires that

we work to become aware of our own assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions, and then, that we strive to put them aside – to bracket them – in order to be open and receptive to what we are attempting to understand’.

3.4.2 Bracketing: An Interpretivist Approach

In addition to the general understanding of bracketing mentioned above, Hatch (2002, p. 86) proposes that *‘the term is also used to describe a specific strategy for separating impressions, feelings, and early interpretations from descriptions during qualitative data collection’*. Hatch (2002) goes on to argue that this conceptualization is as valid and useful for studies involving participant observation as it is for phenomenological endeavors. Such an approach to bracketing enables qualitative researchers to identify and set aside their biases and experiences, and take a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994). Chamberlain (2013) states that implications and assumptions should be clear and explicit when conducting and interpreting IPA research. Hatch (2002) shares the same view when referring to qualitative ventures involving participant observation. Nevertheless, Allen-Collinson (2009, p. 286) argues that, while it is impossible to bracket one’s biases completely, the process enables researchers to suspend their assumptions and *‘adopt a more self-critical and reflective approach in research’*.

Building on the works of Hatch (2002), Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) and Callary, Rathwell, & Young (2015), *the current study assumes that, since both IPA and Peircean semiotics revolve around interpretation, researchers engaging with these*

approaches should not attempt to suspend their biases from research, but, instead, should seek to understand how their taken-for-granted assumptions about the topic might inform and influence their approaches. To emphasize this, Callary, Rathwell, & Young (2015, p. 66) distinguish between *bracketing out biases* (the general understanding of bracketing) and *bracketing in biases* (the understanding of bracketing involving interpretation).

3.4.3 Bracketing *In* Biases

The present research adopts Callary, Rathwell, & Young's (2015) approach to *bracketing in biases*. Building on the work of Moon (2006), they propose that, before developing the research plan and the interview questions, IPA researchers should reflect upon and write down their answers to questions about their own beliefs about the topic under inquiry, how their past experiences have shaped these beliefs, and how these beliefs may affect the upcoming investigation. Due to the nature of the study and the paradigmatic considerations thoroughly addressed in the Methodology chapter, it is proposed that this approach to bracketing can also be extrapolated to the participant observation needed for conducting the semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum.

3.4.3.1 Bracketing *In* Biases: Statement of Positionality

The current study adheres to Sultana's (2007, p.380) statement according to which 'it is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical

research'. The importance of positionality and reflexivity in qualitative academic research has further been emphasized by scholars such as Hall (2004), Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009), Creswell (2013), and Maxwell (2013). Positionality '[...] reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study' and it usually describes individuals' world-view and the position they have chosen to adopt in relation to three areas: the subject, the participants, and the research process and context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 71). It is informed by reflexivity understood as the researchers' sustained explicit attempts to acknowledge, assess and disclose their own views and positions and how these might have influenced the research (Greenbank, 2003; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Such an understanding is rooted in recognition of the researchers as inescapably existing in the social world they are researching (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). More precisely, researchers exist in and investigate '[...] an already interpreted world by the actors, undermining the notion of objective reality' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 225). In turn, the researchers' social, cultural, and political contexts and backgrounds unavoidably shape their research, influence their interpretation, and affect the perceived credibility of their work (Greenbank, 2003; Bryman, 2016). Thus, an open and honest reflexive process and disclosure of researchers' positionality towards their work is proposed for reducing bias and partisanship (Sikes, 2004; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Taking these aspects into consideration, the author of the present study feels the need to mention certain aspects which may have influenced his choice of topic and the subsequent research approach and interpretation.

The author was born and raised in Romania in the last years of the Communist regime, and can openly acknowledge and assume emotional, mental, and physical scars linked to his upbringing under a totalitarian regime. He has experienced the 1989 Revolution and change of political regime, as well as the transition to a democratic society. Although spending the first two decades of his life in Romania, the author has spent the last ten years traveling extensively and living in nations with different political and socio-cultural systems. He has lived in nations with a sustained and robust tradition of critical thinking and freedom of expression such as Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom, in totalitarian Communist nations such as Mainland China, and in fragile democratic systems such as Thailand or Hong Kong. His system of beliefs is represented by a pantheistic worldview rooted in Orthodox Christianity and influenced by Eastern and Western philosophies. The author has been actively researching the field of dark tourism for the last ten years. He is an avid reader of historical and memorial works about (inter)national conflict and political repression, and an outspoken advocate for human rights and freedom of expression. He is very familiar with the literature of the Communist political repression in Romania, he has met former political detainees and visited places of detention, and he pays close attention to recent scholarly, memorial, and judicial developments in this field. In the years leading to the commencement of his PhD studies, he participated and involved himself in projects focused on the identification, popularization, and commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime in Romania. Thus, the author's emotional self-identification and identitarian partisanship with the former political prisoners based on personal experiences and a compassionate personality can be questioned. Considering the sensitivity of the investigated topic, the author

anticipated such possible legitimate concerns and scheduled the research process to include steps and approaches which have the potential to reduce the perceived bias at the different phases of investigation. Thorough analyses of these measures are presented in the following two sections of the study entitled 'Bracketing In Biases: The Research Journal' and 'Assessing Validity in Qualitative Research'.

One famous debate among ethnographers is that of the researchers' position as an insider or outsider to the investigated culture. Scholars such as Merton (1972) have separated the two based on their membership in a specified group or collectivity. Griffith (1998, cited in Mercer, 2007, p.3) provides an alternative distinction when defining an insider as 'someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her [sic] a lived familiarity with the group being researched', and an outsider as 'a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry into the group'. Each position has been argued to have certain advantages and disadvantages. Considering these aspects - and also his own personal status, the methodological underpinnings of the study, and the sensitivity of the topic - the author attempted to conduct research which balances between the two positions. This rests on Mercer's (2007, p.1) argument that 'the insider/outsider dichotomy is actually a continuum with multiple dimensions, and that all researchers constantly move back and forth along a number of axes, depending upon time, location, participants and topic'. As mentioned, the author is a native of Romania and is well-accustomed with the topic of Communist repression based on direct and indirect experiences. Thus, it is argued that he has an 'intimate knowledge' with the researched site and cultural group based on 'lived familiarity' (Griffith, 1998, cited in Mercer, 2007, p.3). Considering both the employed

research methods emphasize the importance of the researcher's familiarity with the investigated topic – Peircean semiotics through the concept of 'collateral knowledge', and IPA through its approach to contextualizing participants' interpretation in the process of 'double hermeneutics' – it is proposed that such an insider approach can enrich the study by providing perspectives which may remain unnoticed by the untrained eye. Additionally, the fact that the researcher has been living for the last ten years and obtaining his education in nations with a sustained tradition of analytical and critical thinking which place a strong focus on ethical considerations is argued to reduce the possibility of him being overly sympathetic to the culture and unknowingly or inherently biased. In turn, this outsider viewpoint enabled the author to raise provocative questions and attempt interpretation on different levels and from varied perspectives, while encouraging and entrusting the local respondents to disclose more honest, detailed, and sensitive information.

3.4.3.2 Bracketing In Biases: The Research Journal

To support the development of interview questions, and also to reduce the chances of imposing personal biases when conducting the semiotic reading, *three day-long visits* at the Sighet Memorial were conducted within a week in the initial stages of research. During these visits, the researcher assumed the role of an active participant in the visiting experience, with the aim of identifying preconceived notions and emotional biases regarding the Communist regime in Romania and the chosen site. The first visit tugged at one's heartstrings and revealed emotional biases caused by the initial engagement with a

site of dark heritage. The second visit revealed mostly cognitive biases, as the researcher knew what to expect from the site regarding emotional engagement and was more focused on narrative details. The third visit was conducted with a certain emotional detachment, and the biases identified during the first two visit were confirmed or disconfirmed. As advised by Hatch (2002), during each visit, reflections and reactions were recorded in *raw notes and protocols*. Once answers to the reflective questions raised above were provided during each visit, they were left for a few days. Then the researcher could reflect upon his reflection on the topic, as suggested by Moon (2006). All of these notes and personal reflections were stored in a *research journal*. Such journals are records of a researcher's 'experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork' (Spradley, 1980, p. 71). In line with the hermeneutic circle, the researcher could refer back to journal entries at all stages of the research project, as 'the information helps with field note interpretation and provides a means of accounting for personal biases and feelings' (Hatch, 2002, p. 88). This exercise has the potential to reveal potential biases which may interfere with the interpretation of the data, but also to bracket in how certain assumptions and beliefs may enrich the interpretation (Hatch, 2002; Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015).

3.5 Validity Assessment

Assessing validity is a fundamental step in any research endeavor. The current section presents the measures adopted in the current study for increasing the level of

validity based on the criteria and four types of techniques developed by Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle's (2001).

3.5.1 Assessing Validity in Qualitative Research

Throughout academia, there is an ever-increasing number of scholars asking for the validity of qualitative research to be evaluated according to different criteria than quantitative research (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Maxwell, 1992; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Golafshani, 2003; Cho & Trent, 2006; Rolfe, 2006; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

The current study adopts the broad definition of validity as '*the state or quality of being sound, just, and well-founded*' (Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 1999, cited in Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, p. 527), as these concepts are valid for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed investigations. The difference lies in the standards of validity, which, in turn, vary according to the type of inquiry. However, developing validity standards in qualitative research is challenging because of the need to integrate rigor, subjectivity, and creativity into the research process (Johnson, 1999).

3.5.2 Criteria

Considering it is the result of a thorough synthesis, the present research adopts Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle's (2001) twofold conceptualization of validity criteria as *primary criteria* and *secondary criteria* (Figure 4).

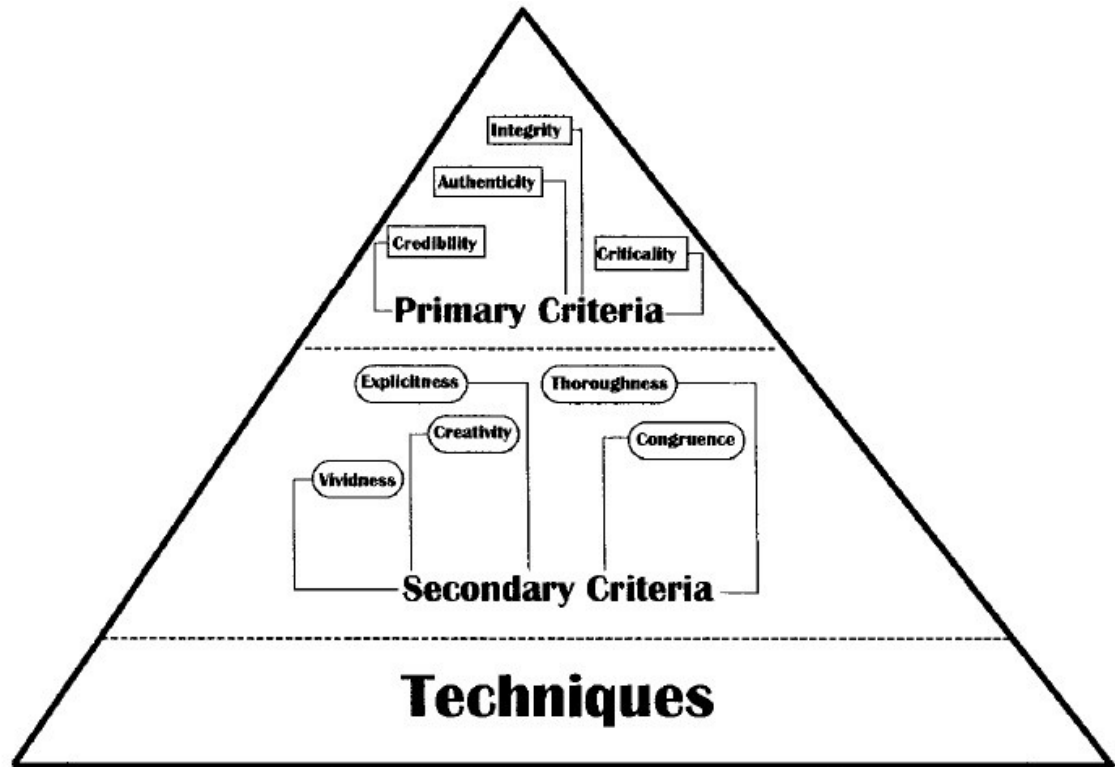


Figure 4 : Validity Criteria for Qualitative Research

(Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001)

3.5.2.1 Primary Criteria

Primary criteria – credibility, authenticity, criticality, integrity - are essential to all qualitative attempts (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

Credibility refers to the relativistic nature of truth claims in the interpretivist tradition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and '[a]ssuring credibility refers to the conscious effort to establish confidence in an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the data' (Carboni, 1995, cited in Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, p. 530).

Closely linked to credibility, *authenticity* requires the depiction of research which reveals the experiences and meanings as they are lived and perceived by the participants (Sandelowski, 1986). As interpretation is an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon, remaining true to the authenticity of the subject under investigation is essential (Hammersley, 1992; Maxwell, 1992; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Such attention to authenticity may uncover multiple, socially constructed, and sometimes contradictory realities (Bailey, 1996).

The need for *criticality* and *integrity* arises from acknowledging the multiplicity, complexity, and subjectivity of researchers' knowledge, assumptions, and interpretations which may influence the investigative process (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). The two are intimately connected, as a demonstrated critical appraisal at each phase of inquiry ensures the integrity of the research (Hammersley, 1992; Johnson, 1999). This critical appraisal involves the identification of researchers' biases towards the investigated topic, the recognition of ambiguities, and the provision of relevant and strong evidence to validate the researcher's interpretations (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

3.5.2.2 Secondary Criteria

Secondary criteria – explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, sensitivity – are additional standards of quality and validity in qualitative research, and are applied more flexibly to particular investigations (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

Explicitness refers to what Lincoln & Guba (1985) called *auditability*, or the ability to follow the interpretative process of the researcher. Similarly, Rodgers & Cowles (1993) advised for a conscious and systematic recording of an audit trail of the generated data. ‘Accounting for methodological decisions, interpretations, and investigator biases’, Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle (2001, p. 531) state, ‘is an important adjunct to research findings, allowing for insight into research judgments’.

Vividness requires the artful, imaginative, and clear presentation of thick and faithful descriptions (Geertz, 1973). These descriptions should be detailed enough to allow for interpretation of meaning, while the context should be observable and vivid (Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998). ‘Thick descriptions provide an understanding of social realities as they are subjectively perceived, experienced, and created by participants’ (Mabry, 2008, p. 218). Building on the work of Sandelowski (1986) and Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner (1995), Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle (2001, p. 531) argue that ‘[p]resentation of rich data contributes to the ability to highlight salient features of themes, portraying the essence of the phenomenon without overwhelming the reader with excessive detail’.

Creativity, while grounded in scientific process, enhances innovation and encourages the researcher to challenge traditional mindsets (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). This is achieved through original and flexible methodological approaches, and inventive ways of organizing, presenting and analyzing data (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

Thoroughness refers to the appropriateness of the choice of participants to the question in hand, the quality and adequacy of data, and the completeness of analysis (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998; Yardley, 2000). ‘Thoroughness implies attention to the connection between themes and full development of ideas’, but also requires convincing answers to the raised questions (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, p. 532).

Congruence is required throughout the entire investigative process. According to Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle (2001, p. 532), it ‘should be evident between the research questions, the method, and the findings; between data collection and data analysis; between the current study and previous studies; and between the findings and practice’. Additionally, findings should be congruent with the methodological or philosophical assumptions of the study (Marshall, 1990), and should fit into contexts outside the study case (Sandelowski, 1986).

Sensitivity is a principle for assessing the validity of qualitative research which requires the researcher to conduct the investigation in ways which are sensitive to the nature and multidimensionality of human, social, and cultural contexts (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Yardley (2000) names this criterion *sensitivity to context*. According to this concept, good qualitative work has to show sensitivity to, for example, the socio-cultural milieu in which the study is situated, the collected data, or the existing literature on the topic (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Finally, sound ‘research serves the purpose of the community in which it was carried out rather than simply serving the community of knowledge producers and policymakers’ (Lincoln, 1995, p. 280).

3.5.3 Techniques

Having proposed the criteria for assessing validity mentioned above, Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle (2001) draw upon previous studies to provide a list of techniques which contribute to validity in qualitative research. However, they go on to propose that the decision of which technique(s) to use cannot be based on determinate rules, but on the purpose of the research, the background of the researcher, and the contextual factors which reflect specific criteria of validity in that particular research situations. In the same vein, Wolcott (1992, p. 27) proposes that techniques can be ‘variously employed, adapted, and combined to achieve different purposes’. Importantly, the researcher should provide justifications of decisions regarding techniques, and congruence among technique, philosophy, and the research question must be evident throughout the study (Sandelowski, 1986).

Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle (2001) identify four types of techniques: design consideration, data generating, analytic, and presentation. What follows in the table below is a listing of the various techniques the current study employs to ensure high levels of research validity based on the criteria and techniques Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle (2001) have provided:

Table 2: Validity Assessment

<i>Type of Technique</i>	<i>Technique</i>	<i>Validity Criteria Met</i>
Design consideration	Articulating decisions about selection of site and participants	Explicitness, Thoroughness, Credibility
	Demonstrating commitment to methodological and philosophical underpinnings	Sensitivity, Congruence, Credibility, Criticality, Integrity
	Detailing the relevance of each participant to the study	Explicitness, Thoroughness, Sensitivity, Credibility
	Obtaining participants' consent	Criticality, Integrity, Sensitivity
	Anticipating concerns of subjectivity and taking preventive measures	Criticality, Integrity, Credibility, Thoroughness
	Giving voice to a diversity of participants	Authenticity, Credibility
	Expressing convergent and divergent opinions	Authenticity, Sensitivity, Credibility
	Increasing researcher's familiarity with the topic, relevant participants' backgrounds, and recent developments in the field	Credibility, Thoroughness, Sensitivity, Congruence
	Scheduling semi-structured interviews focused on open questions	Authenticity, Credibility
Data generating	Articulating data collection decisions	Explicitness, Thoroughness, Credibility
	Demonstrating prolonged engagement with the site, participants, and researched phenomenon	Credibility, Thoroughness, Explicitness
	Providing rich verbatim transcriptions in phenomenological portraits	Vividness, Criticality, Integrity, Authenticity
	Acknowledging research limitations	Criticality, Integrity, Credibility

Analytic	Performing a comprehensive and critical literature review	Sensitivity, Congruence, Credibility
	Placing the interpretation in the appropriate cultural, social, historical and political context	Sensitivity, Thoroughness
	Defining all relevant concepts	Thoroughness, Credibility, Congruence
	Bracketing biases: reflexive journaling and statement of positionality	Criticality, Integrity, Explicitness, Credibility
	Adopting original and flexible methodological approaches (e.g. Peircean semiotics, IPA, Phenomenological Portraits, Bricolage)	Creativity, Sensitivity
Presentation	Articulating theoretical and philosophical underpinnings for deciding to use original and flexible methodological approaches	Explicitness, Credibility
	Providing evidence to support interpretations	Credibility, Criticality, Integrity, Thoroughness
	Providing thick and faithful descriptions in innovative ways	Vividness, Creativity
	Developing visual replicable models to support the findings	Congruence, Criticality, Integrity
	Ensuring the literature review, methodology, analysis, discussion, limitations, recommendation, and conclusion remain focused on the research rationale, aim, question and objectives throughout the investigative process	Credibility, Thoroughness, Congruence, Criticality, Integrity

4. ANALYSIS

This chapter is a twofold interpretative analysis rooted in the practice of hermeneutic circle. The first section is a thorough Peircean semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum through the filter of what has been defined as Romanianness and Romanian Common Knowledge. More precisely, it is explored how the museal interpretation - items, themes, chronology - may iconically, indexically, or symbolically influence the experience with this site. To improve the readability of the thesis and avoid possible negative reactions caused by the repetition of motifs and interpretive arguments, the main body of the thesis includes only the semiotic reading of the entrance area and Room 5 - 'The Maps Room'. The interpretation of these areas comprises some of the fundamental elements of Romanian Common Knowledge and is sufficient for exemplifying the semiotic methodology developed in the current study. To continue the semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum, please refer to the appendix of the thesis. The second section is an interpretative analysis of the meaning-making process of 24 characters – 23 individual interviewees and one collective character. In the spirit of IPA, each portrait is framed by information about the character's relevance to the study. The interpretive focus is on the narrative themes arising, and on the means used to attribute meaning to the topic of investigation. Double hermeneutics allow the researcher to draw interpretive and critical conclusions about each character's sense-making process. This interpretive exercise is complemented and contextualized with a semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum rooted in Romanian Common Knowledge. Thus, for a more profound and holistic understanding of cultural and symbolical values mentioned in this

section – such as Truth, Freedom, Justice – the reader should refer to the main body and footnotes in the semiotic reading of the site. The second section also includes a cross-case identitarian synthesis aimed at identifying broader narrative themes, convergent and divergent views, narrative trends, and other relevant aspects.

4.1 Identity Of The Sighet Memorial Museum: The Semiotic Reading

Above the entrance rests the full name of the museum - ‘The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance’ - which iconically invites visitors to a solemn remembrance and commemoration. The name is accompanied by the official logo of the museum represented by two interlinked items (Figure 5). One is the circle of stars found on the flag of the European Union² which symbolically signifies the ideals of unity, harmony, and solidarity among the peoples of Europe. The other item is a woven crown of thorns which iconically mirrors one of the most important and popular motifs in



Figure 5 : Name and Logo of the Sighet Memorial Museum

² For additional information on the history and meanings of the European Union flag: European Union (2017).

Christianity, the woven crown of thorns³ put on Christ's head by Roman soldiers before his sacrificial Crucifixion. In the context of the Sighet Memorial, the crown of thorns symbolically signifies both the suffering and humiliations of the political prisoners and their resistance through faith. Interlinking these two items into a logo symbolically calls for solidarity and harmony among European nations based on their shared fate of suffering under and resistance against totalitarianism.

Greeting the visitors upon their entrance in section E of the Sighet Memorial Museum is a large sculpture entitled 'Homage to the Political Prisoner – Resurrection' dedicated by the internationally-acclaimed Romanian artist Camilian Demetrescu to the victims of the Communist regime in Romania (Figure 6). This sculpture represents a distorted wooden cross and is meant, according to official museum interpretation, to draw attention to the tragic destiny in place and call for a solemn and respectful spiritual journey.



Figure 6 : 'Homage to the Political Prisoner – Resurrection' by Camilian Demetrescu

³ Bible teachings on Christ's crown of thorns: Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2-5.

The Cross⁴ is the most important symbol of Christianity and is recognized by all denominations as the single visual identifier of their faith. The Christian Cross is seen as a representation of the instrument of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – the Son of God - and symbolizes suffering and death, but also unconditional love, atonement, and the conquering of death itself. The Cross also represents the meeting point between the horizontal material world and the vertical spiritual one. In traditional Christianity, churches are built in the shape of a cross and display a cross on top, and all burial places are marked with a cross made of wood, cast iron, or marble. The distorted wooden cross symbolically signifies the unnatural and brutal death the political prisoners in the Communist prisons of Romania in general and in the Sighet Prison in particular were subjected to. As the interpretation at the Sighet Memorial Museum details, those dead in detention during the Communist regime were usually buried at night in mass graves in locations which remain unknown even today. The death and burial are fundamental existential aspects of the Romanian mythological cycle of life which also includes birth and wedding⁵. Each step involves complex rituals which prepare, accompany, or execute

⁴ For additional information on the history and meanings of the Christian Cross: Pelikan (1973–1990), Becker (1997), Cooke (2005), Cross & Livingstone (2005), McGuckin (2011), Bichir & Codrescu (2012), Williston (2014). Dumitru Stăniloae (the most important Romanian theologian and one of the leading figures of European theology in the 20th century, imprisoned by the Communist authorities between 1958 and 1963) writes about the Cross as a symbol of victorious love over the unavoidable suffering, passions and temptations of daily life (Stăniloae, 1970). Through the unconditional acceptance of the Cross, Christ sanctified His body, which represents the rejection of worldly and ephemeral pleasures and the conquest of death (Stăniloae, 1970). As a symbol of sacrifice, communion, and strength against passions, the Cross is proposed as a means of sanctification and purification of the world (Stăniloae, 1970).

⁵ For additional information on the Romanian mythological understandings and practical underpinnings of ‘cycle of life’, ‘death’, and ‘funeral’: Sârbu (1993), Avram (1994), Culianu (1996), Corniță (1998), Kligman (1998), Panea & Fîfor (1998), Berdan (1999), Ciubotaru (1999), Ghinoiu (1999, 2004), Comanici (2001), Luca & Măndescu (2001), Stăniloae (2004), Bernea (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009), Burada (2006), Ursache (2006), Toplean (2006), Florea (2008a, 2008b, 2008c), Stancu (2009), Bleda (2010), Căliman (2010a, 2010b, 2010c), Mariș (2010, 2011), Bindea & Bindea (2013), Zaharia (2013).

profound qualitative changes in people's lives which, in turn, open up new transformational channels for individuals and collectivities. These rituals exist as bodies of organized elements and actions, each with its own internal structure. Within and among these rituals there are strong timings and connections which ultimately give them the shapes and functions of individuals and communities. The cycle of life involves matters of Genesis and end, creation and death. In so doing, it goes beyond the social to encompass cosmology and ontology. Rituals are ever so complex and mysterious in the Romanian traditions of death and funeral which are displayed and constructed upon the survivalist needs of the soul who is looking for answers to the great questions of existence while seeking healing from having to separate from someone who was part of the concrete societal reality. The ceremonial complex of death and funeral in Romanian tradition usually involves three categories of ritualistic actions: those involving the act of dying, those involving the soul of the deceased, and those involving the living. Several phases – each with its own meaningful purpose – succeed each other in a precise order until the equilibrium between the land of the living and the afterlife is restored. The archaic Romanian lifestyle perceives death as a continuity of the material life, not in an evolutive manner, but as a qualitative leap. This is closely related to the mythological Romanian understanding of space and time⁶. The Romanian understanding of space revolves around

⁶ A fundamental work used in this study for understanding the archaic Romanian perception of space and time is Bernea (2005). '*Spațiu, timp și cauzalitate la poporul român*' [*Space, time, and causality for the Romanian people*']. București: Editura Humanitas. Zérafra (1972) notes that the Romanian individual is fundamentally spatial in both essence and manifestations. Romanian philosopher Blaga (2011) employs two archaic concepts deeply rooted in the collective Romanian thought – 'plai' and 'spațiu mioritic' – to show how Romanians perceive land within a framework of destiny. The Romanians use the word 'loc' to refer to a space imbued with metaphysical meaning and attachment (Moraru, 2011). Its temporal

the traditional perception of the house as the center of one's universe. For the archaic Romanian the house and the land under and around the house are more than material possessions to sustain one's existence. They have strong roots which safe keep and transmit familial, traditional and spiritual values across generations. In so doing, they are the meeting point of any other terrestrial (far away – close by, left – right, here – there, forward – backward), or cosmological (limited – infinite, sky – earth, heaven – hell, central – marginal, village – world) perceptions of space. For the traditional Romanian the house and land are the meeting point of the material-ephemeral-horizontal and immaterial-infinite-vertical axes of existence. Thus, the two are linked to both the spatial and the temporal dimensions of archaic Romanian existentialism. Considering the latter dimension, the Romanian lives one's daily life by the passing of earthly time but existentially reports to an infinite divine temporal creation whose pillars are the Creation of the World and the Final Judgement. The World and Mankind begin and end in God, who is neither past nor future but a continuous presence. While acknowledging one's transient condition, the archaic Romanian never parts from eternity due to his/her deep

correspondent is 'vreme' – sometimes referred to as 'veac' - which the Romanians understand not as a passing of time, but as a fixation or permanence all of mankind's joy and suffering, lives and deaths melt into (Noica, 2014). 'Loc' and 'vreme' form 'lumea' which the Romanians understand as a temporal and spatial receptacle into which everything there is comes into being (Vulcănescu, 1991). As the 'lume' happens in 'loc' and 'vreme', it is in a process of becoming into permanence (Vulcănescu, 1991). 'Loc' and 'vreme' are also dimensions of the 'lume' which enable a metaphysical organization – or 'rânduială' - of all entities which comprise it (Vulcănescu, 1991). One relevant example is the Romanians' belief in the 'locul de veci' ('one's final resting place') and the 'celălalt tărâm' (Bernea, 2005). The 'loc de veci' does not belong to the human world anymore, and is perceived to be under ground, in the ground or, more often than not, somewhere in the skies (Bernea, 2005). It does not exist in the past or future, but in a permanent present which continues to affect the lives of the living (Bernea, 2005). The four Romanian scholars quoted in this footnote were victims of the Communist regime: ethnographer Ernest Bernea (14 years in prison), philosopher Constantin Noica (5 years in prison), philosopher Mircea Vulcănescu (4 years, deceased in prison), philosopher Lucian Blaga (oppressed since 1948, dies in 1961 before being arrested).

belief in an omnipresent living God. Although believing in predetermination and fate, the Romanian adopts an active form of faith aimed at the salvation⁷ of one's soul for the afterlife. Such active belief includes most of the death and funeral rituals which are meant to ensure good conditions for those passing into the afterlife and re-establish existential order for the living. Important rituals upon one's demise include: prayers of forgiveness (confess sins to secure a painless death), lighting up candles (to secure light in the afterlife), closing the deceased's eyes with two coins (to make death seem like a long sleep), washing the deceased's body and dressing it up in new clean clothes (to ensure one's cleanliness in the afterlife), putting the deceased's hands on his/her chest – always right over left (to resemble an eternal prayer), lamenting, wailing, and wearing black (to express grief for one's demise), placing a coin in the deceased's mouth (to pay his/her way through any borders and obstacles while departing this world), a three-day death

7 Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae wrote extensively on the Christian concept of 'salvation', which he perceived as the gift of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection to the Orthodox Church and its followers (2013). 'Salvation', he writes, 'expresses the deepest, most comprehensive and many-sided meaning of the work which Jesus Christ accomplished. In this last dimension, that is to say, understood as the destruction of man's death in all of its forms and the assurance of full and eternal life, the word "salvation" produces in the Orthodox faithful a feeling of absolute gratitude towards Christ to whom they owe the deliverance of their existence and the prospect of eternal life and happiness' (quoted by Kostoff, 2016). Stăniloae (2012, p.37) feels the need to clarify the possible contradictions between two fundamental concepts for Orthodoxy - 'freedom' and 'salvation': 'But a freedom that leads all souls to salvation, or that makes it possible for all of them to pass eternally from good to evil and vice versa, is properly speaking no longer freedom. If all attain salvation either by the will of God or through a law of intrinsic evolution, where is the freedom? Likewise, if souls are led against their will to one incarnation after another, or to one fall after another, where is the freedom? Again, if no one ever reaches perfection in the infinity of divine life, and all continue moving within the plane of eternal relativity, what is freedom good for?'. He proposes that freedom and eternal salvation can only coexist when individuals remove themselves from the constant, automatic, and destructive order of nature through their complete participation in religion (Stăniloae, 2010). Eternal salvation arises when the free conviction of an individual in the possibility of saving oneself within and through a special communion with the divinity is met by an interest of the divinity to save that individual (Stăniloae, 2010).

watch (to defend the soul and body against possible negative and disturbing influences), placing the body in the coffin or 'throne' once it has been carefully prepared (considered as the house of the deceased), and adding useful items and food next to the body (for the deceased to have everything he/she may need in the afterlife). The funeral takes place on the third day, just after noon. Important funeral rituals include: the memorial service in the morning (the priest is asking for the deceased's sins to be forgiven), gathering the funeral procession who accompanies the deceased to the cemetery (so that the deceased does not feel alone), providing alms – food called 'colivă' and 'colaci' in Romanian and red wine - to participants before and after the burial (for paying respects to the deceased), and another memorial service in the deceased's house (for finalizing the departure of the body from this world). During the following 40 days, a series of memorial services called 'parastas' or 'pomenire' are organized during which relatives of the deceased bring offerings, pray and light up candles in order to obtain forgiveness for his/her worldly sins and secure the soul's passage to the Heavens. In Romanian tradition it takes the soul 40 days to roam around restlessly and – if meanwhile treated rightfully by the living – to find its rest and stability in a new world and order. The memorial service on the 40th day also marks the re-establishment of spiritual and social order for the living, as they can now stop wearing black and they can be cheerful again without being inconsiderate to the soul of the deceased. The coffin becomes for the deceased what the house had been for the living, and both are in an organic connection to the Romanian land. It is a lifelong responsibility of the relatives and friends to take care of and pay respects at the burial place. These main rituals are shared and performed by most Romanian Christians, and each includes other smaller formalities which may or may not be performed depending

on how conservative people are and the region they come from. Being thrown in unnamed and unknown mass graves, the victims of the Communist regime in Romania were not allowed a natural death, nor were they given a chance for atonement and easy passage into the Heavens, according to Christian tradition. The twisted shape of the cross symbolically signifies abruptly broken lives and tradition. It also symbolically suggests the eternal torment of the souls of both those deceased in the Communist prisons and of the living who cannot mourn them and pay their respects according to tradition. This sculpture adds further meaning to the visiting experience. Camilian Demetrescu⁸ was an internationally-acclaimed artist whose works of art are on display at important diplomatic venues in the Vatican City. Due to his open anti-Communist attitude, he was forced to leave and work in exile in Italy since 1969. Even if he was given the honor of displaying with work in the heart of the Catholic Church, he never renounced his Orthodox faith. While most of the clergy persecuted and imprisoned by the Communists in Romania were members of the Orthodox Church, those who were imprisoned in the Sighet Prison were Greek-Catholic⁹. Thus, inviting Camilian Demetrescu to develop this sculpture for the Museum is meant to symbolically transcend dogmatic and ritualistic boundaries and invite to solidarity in remembrance between the two main branches of the Christian Church. Many visitors do the Sign of the Cross when stopping by the sculpture. The Sign of the

⁸ Autobiographical works: Demetrescu (1997, 2009). Interview on life in exile: *România Literară* (1999).

⁹ For additional information on the political imprisonment of Greek-Catholic clergy at the Sighet Prison: Rațiu (1990), Ploscaru (1993), Roșca (1998), Prunduș (2003), Fundația Academia Civică (2003), Dobeș (2010).

Cross¹⁰ – meaning ‘In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost’ – is the most important and widespread ritualistic gesture in the Christian faith and is usually used during mass, during prayers, when naming saints, when passing by a church, when approaching an icon, or when paying respects to the dead. The fact that visitors tend to do the Sign of the Cross upon reaching this sculpture iconically signifies they acknowledge it as place for paying respects to the deceased.

Turning around from the ‘Resurrection’ sculpture, visitors find themselves in the ‘Maps Room’ (room 5; Figure 7) which also serves as the reception area for visitors to the Memorial. This room provides a geographical and chronological overview of the Romanian gulag. Governing over the entire room is a large map of Romania onto which crosses mark the prisons, labor camps, areas for internal deportation, psychiatric hospitals used to hold and ‘re-educate’ political prisoners, sites of clashes between partisans and the forces of repression, places of execution, and mass graves.

The fundamental existential meanings of the Cross in Romanian culture – suffering, demise, atonement, love, hope, and conquest over death – have already been mentioned above. Displaying hundreds of crosses within the national boundaries of

¹⁰ For additional information on the history and meanings of the Sign of the Cross in Christianity: Ware (1979), Cleopa (2000), Colliander (2001), Andreopoulos (2007), Galeriu (2013), Tănăsescu (2014). Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae argues that the meaning and strength of the Sign of the Cross lie in its association with the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (Stăniloae, 2012). For Stăniloae (2012), the Holy Trinity is the supreme mystery of existence which explain everything and without which nothing can be explained. The three divine entities coexist in an eternal creative unity and, in so doing, ‘Christ and the Spirit work together to make us sons of the Father’ (Stăniloae, 2003, p.39). This is a reflection of the infinite divine love which illuminates and brings a complete thankfulness to the existence of mankind (Stăniloae, 2012).



Figure 7 : ‘Maps Room’

According to official interpretation, during the Communist regime Romania was dotted with more than 230 places of imprisonment, death, and suffering, excluding the hundreds of headquarters of the secret police and other repressive forces where interrogations also took place. The walls flanking the map boast a detailed chronology of the 45-year Communist regime in Romania. The small and dense writing covering these walls symbolically signifies the suffocating and unsettling history on display. Under the large map, there are several layers of barbed wire. In a history which spans the history of the American frontiers, the World Wars, the Holocaust, the Soviet gulag and beyond, barbed wire has become an international symbol for forced separation, brutal mass

suffering, oppression, inhumane treatment and crimes against humanity¹¹. The layers of barbed wire placed under the map of the Romanian gulag symbolically gain meaning when linked to the fundamental value for Christian Romanians: freedom¹². According to the Christian faith, God has created mankind in His own image as a free entity. Thus, freedom is the most precious gift God has bestowed upon people. God's respect for peoples' freedom is so strong that He does not force anyone to harm, but has given everyone free will which is the ability to choose between good and evil at all moments.

¹¹ For additional information on the history and meanings of barbed wire: Razac (2000), Krell (2002), Netz (2004).

¹² For additional information on the cultural and religious understandings of 'freedom' and 'free will': Adler (1958), Alston (1985), Kane (1985, 1996, 2011), Kasper (1986), Rupp & Watson (2006), Witte & Alexander (2007). For an Orthodox perspective: Lossky (1976), Plămădeală (2004). Three scholars whose work revolves around the existential concept of 'freedom' from an Eastern Orthodox perspective are Paul Evdokimov, Nikolai Berdyaev, and Dumitru Stăniloae. Evdokimov (1994, p.48) quotes Gregory of Nazianzus when writing: 'God has honored man by bestowing freedom upon him so that the good properly belongs to the one who chooses it, no less than to the One who deposited the premises of the good in nature'. In the same line, he writes: 'It is in freedom that the person is realized, being freely opened to the grace that presses on every soul in secret, without ever constraining it' (Evdokimov, 2011, p.51). Seen as the philosopher of freedom, Berdyaev (2009) defines freedom – through an Eastern Orthodox lens - as the baseless foundation of being, as deeper than all being, as the Ultimate which cannot be derived from anything and cannot be made the equivalent of anything. Similarly, Stăniloae (2002, p. 166) argues that 'Freedom, as a sign of spiritual power, is more than just a gift, it is also a result of effort. God breathed spirit into man, but the spirit breathed into him was in great part a potency that man needed to make pass into act. By commanding man not to eat from the tree of consciousness before he was guided by freedom of the spirit, God, in fact, commanded him to be strong, to remain free, and to grow in spirit, that is in freedom. This very commandment made appeal to man's freedom'. Stăniloae (2013, p. 37) builds on his previous work to argue that Christian freedom presupposes an absolute that the human person can fight for or can refuse. Without this absolute the human person lacks all support and any cause for affirmation. In a plane of eternal and universal relativity or of strict nature process, the fight for freedom, which on one hand is presupposed by freedom and on the other hand promotes it, loses any incentive. That is why freedom has two forms: freedom obtained by fighting to achieve the absolute good, to impose its victory, and to unite with it; and freedom obtained by fighting to liberate the person from enslaving passions, so as to enter into loving communion with the supreme Person, with God. It is in this communion that the true and complete good is found. He who has attained this has the true freedom (identical with the true and infinite good) from which he no longer wants to depart and from which he can no longer depart, in the sense of an acquired powerlessness. In this communion the person has an unceasing and unending newness, through the good that shines forth from the supreme Person and is manifested in interpersonal communion.' These three scholars clearly speak of freedom in the Eastern Orthodox tradition as a divine blessing and the path to Truth, Enlightenment, and Resurrection for those who take upon the active responsibility of treating others with the love that God has shown mankind.

In so doing, humans choose their own path either towards virtue and sainthood or towards sin and eternal suffering. Even in times of hardship, God encourages people to carry their own heavy cross – as Christ did on the way to his sacrificial Crucifixion - with dignity towards virtue. For centuries, the Romanians have sought freedom vertically and spiritually (through their lived Christianity), and horizontally and worldly (through the private possession of land onto which they can be the masters of their own lives in their own country). When adjoining its individual parts (the geographical map of Romania, the crosses marking places of death and suffering, the walls covered in chronology, and the barbed wire), this semiotic structure indexically signifies the loss of freedom (freedom of faith, freedom of private ownership, freedom of individual and national autonomy) for most Romanians living in a totalitarian and authoritarian state. It also symbolically signifies the resistance of those who chose to carry their cross, the fall of those who chose to side with the oppressors, and the scale and diversity in the suffering of the Romanian nation during the Communist regime. The text beneath the large map reads the prophetic words of Ana Blandiana, one of the museum developers: ‘When justice cannot be a form of memory, memory in itself can be a form of justice’. Beyond the responsibility of remembering the deceased which has already been discussed, another important Orthodox existential concept is ‘justice’. As mentioned, Orthodox Romanians believe in the Last Judgement, in the heaven-hell duality, and in humans’ ability to influence their own fate through free and unconditional virtuous behavior. Thus, it is expected that on the day of

the Last Judgement¹³ souls will head either to the immortal bliss of Heaven or to the eternal suffering of Hell depending on their worldly actions. In modern Romania, this concept has been extrapolated to the judicial legislative system, and it is generally expected that those involved in reprehensible deeds should pay for their actions¹⁴. Her words iconically signify a rallying cry for moral and judicial equity and national remembrance. The chromatic choice – black and white - adds further meaning to this semiotic structure. In Romanian tradition, white is a symbol of life, light, innocence, while black stands for death, darkness, sin. White is traditionally used at weddings and birth, while black is used at funerals. Thus, using only black and white for designing this section is meant to symbolically signify the life-death duality.

Each category of repression is further detailed in smaller maps flanking the pathway between the ‘Resurrection’ sculpture and the large map of Romania. These smaller maps are interlinked with photographs of the main prisons in Romania, and with four quotes which read: *‘If you want to kill a people, suppress their memory’* (Milan

¹³ Stăniloae (2013, p.58) feels the need to clearly mention that the Father has passed all judgement to the Son who has directly experienced worldly life: ‘The criterion according to which the eternal state will be finalized will be our effort, or lack thereof, to draw near to Him, with our aim being the perfected humanity that Christ realized as a man. Thus Christ does not get this criterion from outside, but He Himself is this criterion. He is the standard for the judgment, and He is the one applying this standard because He alone achieved it, as its model, and He knows it perfectly from within Himself. Moreover, not only is He the criterion and Judge but also the crown with which He, as Judge, rewards those who made the effort to rise toward his level as man, being fulfilled by Him through His perfected humanity.’

¹⁴ Stăniloae (2003) argues that Christians should be concerned with promoting justice not only at individual but also at national and even global levels. In his view, the national and global levels are reachable in modern times due to an elasticity in social structures. He does, however, argue that global justice in an ultimate Christian way cannot be achieved because of the corruptible nature of matter.

Kundera¹⁵), *'Truth remains, no matter of the fate of those who served it'* (Gheorghe I. Brătianu¹⁶), *'Life has lost against death, but memory triumphs against nothingness'* (Tzvetan Todorov¹⁷), and *'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'* (George Santayana¹⁸). Two leitmotifs clearly visible in this section are 'death' and 'memory'. Quoting a Romanian scholar among peers from Eastern, Central, and Western Europe is an iconic call for solidarity among nations in remembering and commemorating the victims of totalitarianism. Also, displaying the same quote which is inscribed on a plaque at the Auschwitz former concentration camp indexically places the victims of Communist regimes on the same level as those of the Nazi's¹⁹.

¹⁵ Milan Kundera - Czech-born French writer, Communist reformist, participant in the 1968 Prague Spring, living in France since 1975.

¹⁶ Gheorghe I. Brătianu - Romanian historian, Liberal politician, professor at the University of Bucharest, member of the Romanian Academy, deceased in the Sighet Prison in 1953.

¹⁷ Tzvetan Todorov - Bulgarian-French philosopher and historian, author of *'Facing the extreme: moral life in the concentration camps'* (1997), *'Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria'* (1999), *'Hope and memory: lessons from the twentieth century'* (2003), and *'Memory as a Remedy for Evil'* (2010).

¹⁸ George Santayana - Spanish-American philosopher and essayist whose words *'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'* are also inscribed on a plaque at the Auschwitz concentration camp.

¹⁹ The last decade has seen an increase in international efforts to treat crimes of Communist regimes with the same consideration and seriousness as the crimes of the Nazis. On 3rd June 2008, the *'Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism'* was signed by prominent European politicians, historians, and former political prisoners. It calls for a pan-European condemnation of, and education about, the crimes of Communism, and for placing the crimes of Communism and Nazism on the same level of interest (Voltaire Network, 2008). In its aftermath, the date of 23rd August was designated by the European Parliament as the *'European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism'* (European Parliament, 2009). On 25th February 2010, the *'Declaration on Crimes of Communism'* was adopted and called for *'the creation of a new international court with a seat within the EU for the crimes of Communism. Communist crimes against humanity must be condemned by this court in a similar way as the Nazi crimes were condemned and sentenced by the Nuremberg tribunal, and as the crimes committed in former Yugoslavia were condemned and sentenced'* (Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, 2011, p. 454). In December 2010, the governments of six EU member states called upon the European Commission to make the *'approval, denial or belittling of Communist crimes'* an EU-wide criminal offence (Deutsche Welle, 2010). On 14th October 2011, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience –

This room is an incredibly complex semiotic structure whose iconical, indexical, and symbolical functions rest upon the most fundamental and deeply rooted existential aspects of the Romanian tradition: the Christian Cross, the land, the cycle of life, freedom, love, and justice. The Romanian gulag assembly (composed of the large map of Romania, the hundreds of crosses, the barbed wire, the chronological writing, and Ana Blandiana's statement on justice and memory) and the 'Homage to the Political Prisoner - Resurrection' sculpture are facing each other. The two are connected through a corridor of small maps, photos of prisons, and quotes on death and memory. In this room, life and death, resistance and fall, suffering and soothing, justice and injustice, truth and lie, remembrance and oblivion are symbolically standing face to face. It is symbolically signified that what separates a humiliating national history from a dignified national present and future, and also what may bring rest and salvation to the souls of the victims who were not allowed a natural death is their long-lasting remembrance. Individual and collective atonement and conquest over death can be symbolically achieved through personal and national commemoration.

nowadays comprised of 55 government agencies and NGOs from 13 EU member states and the US – was established with research, education, and popularization purposes in the field of totalitarian regimes (The Platform of European Memory and Conscience, 2014). Such initiatives were received with mixed reactions: they 'attracted support in bodies such as the European Parliament. But it has infuriated some, if not all, Jewish activists; left-wing politicians (mostly from Western Europe); and inevitably, Russia' (The Economist, 2011).

4.2 Identity *With* The Sighet Memorial Museum

This section depicts the 24 phenomenological portraits and a cross-case identitarian synthesis. As mentioned, each portrait is framed by information about the character's relevance to the study.

4.2.1 Phenomenological Portraits

- **Portrait Number 1: Mr. Ion Iliescu**

Relevance to Study: President of Romania (1990 – 1996; 2000 – 2004). Member of the Union of the Communist Youth since 1944. Member of the Communist Party of Romania from 1953 - where he was part of the Central Committee – until the Romanian Revolution in December 1989.

Having been informed on the topic of the current study, Mr. Iliescu begins with a set of statements which eventually becomes one of the leitmotifs of his meaning-making process and sets the tone for the entire interview. The fact that Mr. Iliescu immediately associates the topic of Communist political prisons in Romania with his father's imprisonment and subsequent demise at the hands of the far-right regime which preceded the Communist one reveals a meaning-making process intimately connected to his childhood memories. Also, considering Mr Iliescu is currently being prosecuted for crimes against humanity in the 1989 Revolution and the 1990 repression of the student

protests²⁰, repeated narrative connections between the crimes of the Communist regime and his father's arrest by the far-right administration which preceded the Communist regime appears as a conscious or unconscious attempt of excusing the crimes of one political system by generalizing such repressive actions across different regimes:

'One year after being released from prison, my dad suffered a heart attack and passed away. He was 44 years old in 1945. I was 15 at the time. I grew up without a father. For most of my childhood, my father was in prison.'

In the same line, he feels the need to detail his personal and familial drama at the hands of the far-right administration. The narrative link between his birth and his father's arrest, and the repeated statement 'I was a child/kid' in close connection to his father's imprisonment and the subsequent effect it had on the family critically reveal that strong identitarian roots can be found in this perceived dramatic moment of his life. His perception of growing up in the administrative system preceding the Communist regime is expressed in a sequence of words such as 'suspect individual', 'arrested', 'trial', 'trail of the prisons', and 'forced to leave the house'. Considering Mr. Iliescu eventually joined the Communist Party and became a member of the Central Committee, narratives of his parents joining the Communist movement at any cost from its initial secretive stages reveal the ontological transformation such childhood memories have had on his subsequent meaning and decision-making processes:

²⁰ For up-to-date information about President Ion Iliescu's trials for crimes against humanity: Trial International (2018).

'I was born in the family of a railway worker. He had joined the syndicate in the 1920s. In 1931 he took part in the 5th Congress of the Communist Party and became a member. So, in the context of those times, he became a suspect individual since the Communist Party was illegal. Only a few risked getting involved in the movement under such conditions. This is the atmosphere, the climate I grew up in during the 1930s. I had my father around just for a little time. I was a child when he was arrested, I witnessed his trial, and then I went on the trail of the prisons - Jilava, Caracal, Târgu Jiu, Lagăr - together with my mother, until she also entered illegality and became a suspect to the Siguranță. [...] In 1942, she was forced to leave the house, and I was left with an aunt, a sister of my dad, for three years during the war. I was a kid. [...] In '44 the family was reunited when my dad was released from prison. This was when I enrolled in daytime classes in the Spiru Haret high-school. In less than one year, my father passed away. He was 44 and had a heart attack during a meeting of the telecommunication syndicate members. It was not an easy time for us without a father. I had a brother living with my mother - the first wife of my father. A new brother was born in 1938 and one more in 1945 after my father had already passed away.'

Adding to his perceived familial tragedy is an educational hardship he directly links to Ion Antonescu's far-right administration preceding the Communist regime. His references to 'my aspiration' and 'pity we cannot aim higher' reveal the importance he places in his identitarian meaning-making process on the perception of unfulfilled potential and broken dreams in his early forming years:

'In 1941, I was studying at the industrial high-school Polizu. A new law issued during Antonescu's regime disabled graduates of industrial high-schools to pursue university studies at the Polytechnic. The high-school at that time was just next to the Polytechnic, close to the North Railway Station. My aspiration was to go to the Polytechnic and become an engineer. When this law was passed, I decided to change high-schools to a theoretical one. I spent the whole summer studying Mathematics with a good professor. Three of us stood out from the crowd, and this professor told us it is a pity that we cannot aim higher.'

The way Mr. Iliescu makes sense of these perceived dramas of his early life under the far-right regime is by comparing them to the improved living conditions and support brought to his life by the Communist movement. For example, when his father was imprisoned, *'a certain structure for helping the families of those in prison was created: Ajutorul Roșu [the Red Support], later Apărarea Patriotică [the Patriotic Defence]. My mum worked for the Apărarea Patriotică'*. He also details his fast and sustained educational and professional progress inside the Communist Party. This perception is expressed in a sequence of words and remarks such as 'important chance of continuing our studies', 'opportunity', 'given a mission', 'propelled', and 'promoted'. The contrast between his perceived living status before and after the Communist Party came to power adds dramatism to his narrative, while exposing a decisional process rooted in childhood memories:

'Then I enrolled the Polytechnic University – the Faculty of Hydromechanics. During my second year, we got the important chance of continuing our studies in Moscow. Five

hundred young students chose to take on this opportunity. My wife had already left for Moscow in 1949. I joined a prestigious Institute for Energy. In 1954 I finished my studies, returned to Romania and joined the Institute for Studies and Projects in Energy. Subsequently, I was given a mission to be a representative at the International Union of the Students in Prague, created after the War in the spirit of anti-fascist cooperation. During that year I took part in some congresses organized by the French students. This union was dissolved during the Cold War. Then I worked in education, and I was eventually propelled to the leadership of the Union of the Working Youth. I was appointed as the Prime Secretary. In the Party line, I was promoted and worked in the section of Science and Culture. Then I got into a certain connection with Ceaușescu, who had become General Secretary of the Party. He knew my parents well and had a certain liking towards me.'

Another way Mr. Iliescu makes sense of the discussed topic is by detailing the context of his separation from Nicolae Ceaușescu's totalitarian line of rule which culminated in his active participation in the 1989 Revolution. He attributes meaning to this separation by narrating places he was sent to for 're-education', repeating words such as 'exclusion' and 'conflict', and by linking it to an alleged public support during the 1989 Revolution. Mr. Iliescu attributes further meaning to this aspect by describing his perception of the ontological transformation brought about by the change of regime in 1989 on the Romanian society. The nature of this transformation is expressed in words and remarks focused on democratic practices, such as 'abolition of a one-party system', 'political pluralism', 'new parties', 'elections', 'debates', 'democratic freedom of speech', and 'electoral law'. References to 'military fight' and repeated 'shootings' add

dramatism and meaning to his sense-making. The fact that Mr. Iliescu adjoins the narrative of opposing Ceaușescu to the 1989 Revolution, its effects on the Romanian society and his subsequent two presidential mandates reveals a perception of self as a parent figure of Romanian democracy. In attributing meaning to this aspect, he introduces another important theme of his meaning-making process: the personal assumption of responsibility for initiatives aimed at societal change. He expresses this through a series of first-person statements which culminate with the imperative remark ‘I was directly involved in the Revolution!’. The emphasis on ‘spontaneous support’, ‘we suddenly found ourselves in this atmosphere’, ‘spontaneous rallies of support’, and ‘propelled by a popular movement’ in his meaning-making process gains meaning through the contrasting filter of an ever-increasing increasing number of historical works arguing that the 1989 Revolution was, in fact, a planned coup d’état²¹:

‘Overtime, disagreements appeared between us. He was impulsive, so in February he named me Secretary of the Central Party Committee only to propose my exclusion in July. He sent me to Timișoara for re-education for about three years. From there he sent me to Iași, on the other side of the country. For five years I was the president of the County Council. Then he sent me to work in the Ministry of Waters so that I could go back to my profession for about five years. I was running the National Council for Waters. I soon got into a conflict with Ceaușescu because of a project someone proposed for building a water

²¹ For a synthesis of historical views on the events which led to the change of regime in Romania in 1989: Cesereanu (2004). For a thorough history of coups d’état in Romania: Stoenescu (2010). In December 2017, the Military Prosecutor confirmed the hypothesis of a coup d’état by showing there was no power vacuum in 1989 (Andreiana, 2017; Pepine, 2017).

channel between the Danube and Bucharest. I explained to him this project is not feasible, and there is no way to navigate towards Bucharest, but the idea was strongly stuck in his head. We had this conflict, but he would not listen to my arguments. So, he replaced me from my position. After three months I became the director of the >>Tehnică<< publishing house. This was my job when the Revolution started in 1989. [...] After Ceaușescu ran away by helicopter, I appeared in the balcony and received spontaneous support from those who knew me and saw in me a symbol of the resistance against Ceaușescu. [...] I was directly involved in the Revolution! It was clear that Ceaușescu would not come back and the atmosphere in the square was mirroring the collective mental state. My first question was how we should put order into what was happening. A few of us went to an office and tried to put on paper some ideas, some thoughts of what our public message should be. This is how the Proclamation of the Revolution was developed. The first point was the abolition of a one-party system and the introduction of the political pluralism normal for a democracy. While I was working on the proclamation, the military fight began. I did not know who was shooting and where they were shooting from. We suddenly found ourselves in this atmosphere. [...] I spent the following days in the headquarters of the Ministry of National Defense. On the 27th, once the shootings became scarcer, we could meet up again. By the 31st December we put together a structure for political pluralism. By the 30th January 1990, 30 new parties were developed. By the time of elections, there were 70 parties. During the following four months, we organized the CPUN (the Council of the Parties for National Unity). People were enjoying the new debates because democratic freedom of speech was something new. We issued many decrees and laws. We developed a whole new legislation, including

the electoral law. In May we organized elections. During the one-month electoral campaign, there were spontaneous rallies of support all over the country. There were three candidates for the presidential elections, and I obtained 85% of the votes. This is how the new context of the democratic organization of life came into being. [...] I was propelled by a popular movement. And the elections in 1990 reflected this public perception. Then I was re-elected in 1992 until 1996. In fact, 1996 brought the alternation in governance, which showed that we had indeed established a democratic framework. [...] In 2000 I was elected again for a four-year mandate.'

Mr. Iliescu brings back the leitmotif of his father's imprisonment when detailing his awareness of political prisons under the first Communist leader of Romania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Although not denying their existence, he makes sense of their presence through generalization across nations of the USSR, and across political regimes. His remark '[t]hey gave tit for tat' hints at this generalization being consciously or subconsciously used as a means of excusing or minimizing the crimes of the Communist regime. As previously discussed, such a narrative is critically presumed to hold stronger meanings through the filter of Mr. Iliescu's ongoing trial for crimes against humanity:

'I had no connection to this domain. I was familiar with the prisons of the previous regime. I went to visit my dad in Jilava, Caracal, Târgu Jiu. Regarding the regime of Dej, there was a similar situation in all countries subordinated to the USSR. They gave tit for tat to those who had previously condemned the Communists to prison. This happens under all regimes.'

When referring directly at the Sighet Memorial Museum, Mr. Iliescu mentions he *'passed by once'*, and repeats the same argumentation of his father's and other Communists' imprisonment by the previous regime to express his opinion on the museum. Again, he attributes meaning to the museal institution by generalizing political imprisonment across political regimes. References to *'the Communists did not pioneer'* and *'the Communists only took over'* critically suggest conscious or unconscious attempts to minimize or excuse the repressive actions of a political regime by redirecting the perceived blame for such initiatives:

'In that place, they are trying to exemplify what this realm of prisons was about. But the Communists did not pioneer the concept of >>prison<<. My father was in prison. Doftana is an ancient prison where many people spent time. The Communists only took over from the previous regime and gave it different connotations. Sighet is only a page of a history with deeper roots.'

Under the same umbrella of museology, Mr. Iliescu stresses that the ongoing discussions for the development of a Communism-focused museum in Bucharest revolve around the harmful effects of this regime on the Romanian nation. He feels the need to counterbalance such a speech by mentioning certain perceived positive effects of the Communist rule over Romania. Within this framework of meaning-making, he then states that: *'I do not have any opinion about this, I have not taken part in such a debate'*. In different moments of the interview Mr. Iliescu does, nevertheless, provide his perspective on the need for a balanced approach to historiographical and museal interpretations and representations of the history of the Communist regime. He does this by introducing

another leitmotif of his sense-making process: the fact that Communism had both positive and negative effects on the Romanian society. This leitmotif is expressed and made sense of through the frequent repetition of the contrasting good-bad duality throughout the narrative. Another way he attributes meaning to this leitmotif is by contrasting the perceived good influence of societal industrialization under the Communist regime to the societal struggles in the internationalized, competitive, and interest-driven post-1989 market economy:

'Many tackle the topic with a vengeful perspective. We do not need this. But we cannot overlook moments of history. This is something else. Such matters must be analyzed from historiographical perspectives. The historians should debate and decide upon the appropriate framework. Written history should include all aspects. And debates among historians on how history should be reflected and interpreted in museums are also needed. Such historical moments should not be passed by or omitted, it is a lived history with its good and bad aspects. The Communist period also had positive things, not only bad ones. For example, those were the times when changing the status of the nation from an eminently rural one was decided upon. An industry was set in place which gave the nation a whole new foundation. No matter on the political regime, this change in society was an objective necessary goal. We must present history as it was, with its good aspects. Good things were done, but the country cannot keep up with the competition caused by foreign capital which dominates the economic market. These are matters which must be looked at in all their complexity. [...] There are some damned flaws of capital holders who try to impose their own interests. It is a world in movement with good and bad aspects, and with the inherent conflicts arising from such interactions.'

In the same line of a good-bad duality, Mr Iliescu feels the need to attribute meaning to the post-1989 Romanian society by contrasting the societal progress before 2004 – including his two presidential mandates – to the perceived regress under President Traian Băsescu²². Mr. Iliescu makes sense of this aspect by attributing subjective insulting labels to President Băsescu, such as ‘intellectually-limited’, ‘primitive’, and ‘a sailor with his bad habits, with alcohol in his throat and his head’. His emotional involvement is also expressed through exclamatory remarks and rhetorical questions:

‘It is the natural evolution in an open and democratic environment which has been a characteristic of our evolution ever since the 1989 Revolution. Unfortunately, after 2004, instead of moving forward we confronted other problems. Băsescu may have his strong points, but he is still a rather intellectually-limited man and has interests which are reflected by the way Romania developed during his mandate. [...] The elections in 2004 surprised me! Our candidate was Năstase, an intellectual figure. And the popular option went toward Băsescu, a sailor with his bad habits, with alcohol in his throat and his head at all times. They preferred him! Năstase should also reflect upon this. Why has he not managed to win this confrontation against a primitive man?!’

Having not directly mentioned the repressive Communist measures in the above statements, Mr. Iliescu admits them when talking about the recent 20-year prison sentence received by Alexandru Vișinescu - the former commander of the Râmnicu Sărat penitentiary for political prisoners under the Communist regime - for crimes against

²² Traian Băsescu – President of Romania (2004-2009; 2009-2014). Former member of the Communist Party of Romania.

humanity. Mr. Iliescu's perceived nature of such individuals is expressed in labels such as 'brute' and 'hideous':

'Someone like Vişinescu is a hideous person. Those who were in prisons and met him confirm he was a brute. And such people should be treated and trialed accordingly.'

As Mr. Iliescu's meaning-making process unfolds, justice reveals itself as an essential narrative theme. Continuing this theme, he feels the need to detail his perception of judicial acts focused on political repression. The repetition of words such as 'resentment', 'passions', and 'venom' expresses his call for objective and not revengeful justice. His words gain important meanings considering Mr. Iliescu himself has recently been officially charged with crimes against humanity for his involvement in the 1989 Revolution and in the miners' violent repression of student protesters in June 1990:

'They should be trialed with eyes open. These historical aspects should not be avoided or passed by; they must be tackled with realism and the objectivity of the historical researcher, not with resentment and passions. [...] History must be attempted without resentment and limits, with the necessary equilibrium which serves today's generations and not with venom. Nothing good comes out of venom.'

In fact, he directly tackles the accusations brought to him for his involvement in the 1989-Revolution and the events of June 1990, and links them to democracy and a mixture of personal assumption of responsibility and fate. Through the filter of the investigated topic, statements such as 'life imposed this onto me' together with the sustained repetition of the leitmotif according to which history has good and less good/bad aspects critically reveal a meaning-making process which perceives the victims of the

Communist regime, of the 1989 Revolution and the miners' violent intervention in June 1990 as the result of historical destiny:

'This is the course of history all over the world, with good and less good aspects. That some people express their views is a different thing...it is democracy! I never expected for everybody to approve of my actions. This was not my goal for doing politics. I did it because of necessity; life imposed this on me. I assumed responsibility in times which were not easy and in a process which was not simple of putting together a democratic society with the structures and legislation of the rule of law. That some people criticize me is democracy!'

This speech about the Communist regime in Romania and the 1989-Revolution being just moments in a historical destiny of the world which boats both positive and negative aspects reappears at different moments of the interview. He expresses this perception by repeating words such as 'life', 'fate', 'destiny', 'luck', or 'context'. This is further expressed through the repeated labeling of the victims of the Communist regime as 'human sacrifices' and as passive outcomes of a complicated historical setting. Considering Mr. Iliescu has recently been indicted with crimes against humanity, such a choice of narrative words critically appears as a conscious or unconscious attempt to depersonalize the victims of Communist repression and, thus, to remove guilt and responsibility from the perpetrators and the ideology itself. He achieves this by bringing back in the discussion the leitmotif of good and bad aspects of history which he places in an international framework of transitions to democracy. In so doing, he reiterates his perception of the ontological transformation brought by the 1989 Revolution to the

Romanian society. This perception is expressed in concepts such as ‘crucial historic moment’, ‘changed the fate of the country’, ‘opened the nation’, and ‘entered a new era’. To add meaning and dramatism to his narrative, he contrasts this ontological transformation to the perceived nature of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime expressed through words such as ‘fossilized regime’, ‘primitive leader’, and the repetition of ‘sacrifices’. In the same line of societal transformation, Mr. Iliescu feels the need to emphasize the importance of young generations knowing the modern national history which enables them to build a solid future:

‘Some things are good, some are less good. The 1989 Revolution marks a crucial historic moment. It was a radical changing point in the life of the nation. We must treat the Revolution as a historical moment which changed the fate of the country and the people. It opened the nation to the world and the natural process taking place all around us. We did not have the luck of other nations for a peaceful transition, as the Polish or Czechs did. Our destiny was more tragic. This is because of the fossilized regime and the personal features of Ceaușescu and of those who served him. Instead of understanding the reality, to see the world changing around him...that summer Poland organized free elections! Bulgaria the same, they replaced Zhivkov and chose the path to democracy! Ceaușescu did not see this. Having such a primitive leader – albeit supported by an entire mechanism - was our bad luck. We had to experience sacrifices in human lives. Unfortunately, it was a historical context soaked in human sacrifice. On the other hand, we entered a new era, we developed a democracy, the rule of law with good and bad aspects. [...] We have gone through a complicated, delicate and difficult history. A war, during which we first went towards the East, then towards the West. Efforts, sacrifices, many human sacrifices. I

believe the Romanian society has matured. Good and bad things accumulated, but December 1989 showed that this was a mature nation who knew how to take necessary and difficult decisions in major moments. Something was built, and this can be perfected. The duty of each generation is to add something extra to this foundation...for the better! It is not always possible, but life is like this.'

- **Portrait Number 2: Mr. Emil Constantinescu**

Relevance to Study: President of Romania (1996-2000). Founding president of the Romanian Foundation for Democracy.

Mr. Constantinescu begins making sense of the topic under investigation by providing thorough and intimate details of his family's suffering under the Russian occupation and the Russian-supported Communist authorities. Personal childhood memories of deportation from his birthplace caused by the Russian troops of occupation reveals such memories as central to his subsequent meaning and decision-making processes. This is presumed to hold strong meanings for Mr. Constantinescu, considering the deportation of Romanians led to the rupture of Bessarabia from Romania and its transformation in an independent state – the Republic of Moldova – under the influence of Russia, a historical act which remains a sensitive topic for many Romanians. He employs dark humor – the reference to 'Emil Ivanovici' – to explain the process of Russification of Bessarabia which involved the forced imprisonment of Romanians in Siberian camps, the relocation of Russians to the occupied territories, and the enforcement

of Russia culture and language over the Romanian ones. The mentioning of Nicolae Rădescu²³'s forced resignation which led to the complete seizure of power by the Communist Party adds strength to the narrative considering Mr. Constantinescu became the first non-Communist head of state after the 1989 Revolution:

'I know more than anyone else the hardships of political persecution. I was born in Tighina by the Nistru River in 1939. A few months later we became the first refugees against the Red Army. One year later we came back to Tighina. I have no memories from those few months of life. I know stories from my family. But I have memories from when I was five years old, and we had again to seek refuge against the Red Army. I remember the cattle wagons, the troops. On our return, we saw that many in Bessarabia had been killed, sent to Siberia, much had been destroyed. We knew directly what many did not know. My family knew from the beginning what the Red Army means. Had my dad been a bit late to reach the closing of the border, my name would now probably be Emil Ivanovici and – if still alive – I would be somewhere in Siberia. [...] I was seven years old, and I remember my father coming home one day and telling us that – with the removal of Rădescu from power – the Communists would do what they had done in Russia and that hard times were upon us. [...] Many members of my family were persecuted. My dad's first cousin was arrested and imprisoned for many years because, upon the entry of the Red Army in Bucharest, he had just published a book themed >>The Critique of the Soviet

²³ Nicolae Rădescu – The last pre-Communist Prime Minister of Romania, forced to resign on 1st March 1945.

Communist System<< which could be found in all bookstores. He had graduated in *Philosophy and Economics*.'

In the same line, Mr. Constantinescu feels the need to narrate similar instances of suffering and imprisonment of other individuals close to him. The focus on the priests who baptized him and on his godfather exposes the profoundly Christian nature of his meaning-making, considering Baptism is one of the most critical aspects of Christianity with strong archaic symbols and rituals attached. The narrative connection between his baptism and the fate of those who took part in this important moment of his life exposes a perceived lifelong identitarian connection with the realm of Communist repression. His choice of examples and his need to detail the reasons for their arrest also reveals his sustained exposure to acts of anti-Communist disobedience and resistance. Mr. Constantinescu's purposeful mentioning of his meeting with Gheorghe Arsenescu – the leader of the 'Haiducii Muscelului' ('The Outlaws of Muscel') armed anti-Communist resistance group – adds further strength to his narrative. Considering Mr. Constantinescu's subsequent involvement in projects dedicated to the commemoration and memorialization of the victims of the Communist regime, it can be critically assumed that such early personal encounters with the universe of Communist repression and anti-Communist resistance have produced an ontological transformation of his meaning and decision-making processes. This influence is assumed and expressed in the frequent repetition of 'mentor':

'Many of my mentors were also persecuted. I was baptized at the New Neamț Monastery. My godfather was Constantin Tomescu, who was the Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox

Theology in Chişinău. He also ended up imprisoned for many years because he had an important role in a government which made the Communist Party illegal. He was arrested, then freed, then arrested again for a poem called >>Longing for Bessarabia<<. He kept being my mentor until he passed away at 90-something years. I was baptized by two priests. One of them called Țepordei crossed the border and sought refuge in Romania. He was arrested by the Securitate and sent to Siberia for having published some articles against Stalin. He suffered terribly! When Khrushchev came to power, he managed to make his way back to Romania, only to be arrested by the Securitate again. When he became a priest, I was the first child he baptized. When I returned from refuge, my mentor was priest Virgil Popescu from the Brădet Monastery, who was the prime cousin of Arsenescu. I actually met Arsenescu and other anti-Communist partisans. Virgil Popescu was arrested and condemned to hard labor for life. He was eventually freed only to die one year after liberation. [...] This is the world I grew up in. They never complained. Thanks to them I ended up studying law. [...] One other thing they taught me is to never make any compromise, as even the smallest compromise would be used against me.'

A leitmotif of Mr. Constantinescu's meaning-making on the investigated topic is his personal assumption of responsibility for actively involving in events and initiatives for the democratization of the Romanian society in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 Revolution. One instance he mentions is his election as the rector of the University of Bucharest. To make sense of this aspect, he contrasts the highly politicized academic environment under the Communist regime to the first democratic elective process in seven decades which propelled him as a rector:

‘The professors and students – after getting rid of the previous rector who was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party – organized some gatherings with the purpose of students in all faculties to evaluate their educators. It was a unique moment in the history of Romanian education, it has never happened before or after. [...] My election as a rector in 1992 represented the first academic elections in 70 years, all before me were appointed based on political criteria.’

Under the same umbrella of personal assumption of responsibility, Mr Constantinescu thoroughly details one episode which holds strong meanings in the collective Romanian mindset: the sustained sit-in student protests for the exclusion of former active cadres of the Communist Party from the newly established democratic institutions in the first months of 1990, and Mr Constantinescu’s decision to transform the balcony of the University of Bucharest into a forum for democratic discussions. To add further meaning and dramatism to the narrative, he places this gesture in the context of censorship and fear characterizing those days which he expressed in words such as ‘extremely harsh administrative pressure’, ‘military regime’, and ‘violent measures’. In so doing, Mr. Constantinescu also introduces another major theme of his meaning-making process: the continuation of structures, individuals, practices, and values from the former Communist regime into the post-1989 Romanian society. The frequent repetition of ‘democracy’ and its derivatives when referring to freedom of expression and choice places it at the core of his personality. For someone raised in the spirit of Orthodox Christianity such as Mr. Constantinescu, this is presumed to hold deeper meanings considering Freedom is a fundamental decisional driver and also the ultimate life goal for Christian believers:

‘One fact I am proud of – also unique in the history of the Romanian educational system – was the calling for a moral vote in the League of Students. I unanimously obtained this moral vote. Why did I obtain this? Due to my assumption of responsibility for opening the balcony of the University in 1990, which turned the University of Bucharest into a forum for democratic discussions in the long-lasting manifestations organized in the University Square. My colleagues and I assumed responsibility for this action despite an extremely harsh administrative pressure against opening this balcony. Now we know that Romania had, at that point, a military regime. Nowadays people can analyze this as a historical fact. But in those days of the University Square, we did not know when the repressive troops of the Army, Securitate, and Militia would take violent measures against us. The students asked me to speak from the balcony to the protesters in the University Square. This was the first public speech in which I asked for an education in the spirit of democracy. [...] Based on my act of opening the balcony during the events in the University Square, the subsequent democratic speech in Romania was built. In a speech I held for the 25th anniversary of the Romanian Revolution [...] I explained why the transition to democracy in Romania has been different to other European nations: it was the only nation where, after a bloody revolution, the leading officials of the Communist Party and their repressive mechanism stayed in power; an active opposition comprised of the intellectual and political elites could not be established because in Romania all democratic opponents were arrested before actually taking any action.’

Mr. Constantinescu continues making sense of his active support for the 1990 student protests by narrating their brutal repression by industrial workers and coal miners in what became colloquially known as The Mineriad. In so doing, he reiterates the theme

of the persistence of elements of the former Communist regime in post-1989 Romania by accusing the secret police of the Communist Party for organizing the repression of student protesters. Adding dramatism to the narrative are words describing the treatment Mr. Constantinescu was subjected to during those days because of his decision to support the students, such as ‘arrested’, ‘destroyed’, ‘urinated’, ‘axes’, ‘intimidation’, and ‘accused’. The mentioning of sharing this treatment with Ana Blandiana reveals a strong connection with the developer of the Sighet Memorial Museum based on shared values, actions, and struggles. He also brings back the theme of personal assumption of responsibility when narrating the actions he initiated as the President of Romania for supporting the victims of the Minerad seek justice:

‘Soon after opening the balcony, the invasion of the University by the miners happened. The order had been issued for some of us – including Ana Blandiana, Ticu Dumitrescu, and myself – to be arrested on the accusation of leading a fascist coup d’état. This order was revoked due to international pressure. Led by the Securitate, they destroyed my offices and labs, they urinated on my scientific works, they left axes in my labs for intimidation. This did not happen to other colleagues of mine, so the whole thing was very selective and carefully planned. Later, legal action was initiated against me. I was accused of instigation, as the miners’ actions were linked to my initiative of opening the balcony of the University and speaking to the protesters. They wanted me to pay for all the destructions caused by the miners in Bucharest. So, I developed a portfolio of testimonials, of destructions and calculations, which still represents the basis for the trial of the Mineriad. The people who were maltreated by the miners were scared to seek justice as the prosecutors were working for the new regime. So, the people started seeking justice

only after I became president. I invited them to form the Association of the Victims of the Mineriad, I supported them, and gave power to Dan Voinea to find those responsible.'

As his meaning-making process on the investigated topic unfolds, Mr. Constantinescu feels the need to connect the brutal repression of the students during the 1990 Mineriad to subsequent actions which eventually led to his election as the President of Romania. The repetition of 'solidarity' shows the importance he places on individuals and organizations focused on the democratization of Romania and on protecting the rights of the victims of Communist repression coming together. Adding strength to this perceived need for solidarity are words used to describe the nature of the regime they were trying to change, such as: 'bloody', 'repressive', 'not given permission', and 'usual manipulation'. The theme of personal assumption of responsibility is again brought into discussion when Mr. Constantinescu speaks in first-person about actions he initiated, but also when he mentions that the Civic Alliance formed through 'personal individual enrolment'. Considering the Civic Alliance had a fundamental role in the development of the Sighet Memorial Museum, narratives of his active involvement in the establishment of the Civic Alliance reveals a perceived identitarian connection with the Sighet Memorial. The peak of narrative intensity is reached when Mr. Constantinescu remembers a march of 500,000 attendees when people first called his name for presidency:

'After the bloody events involving the University of Bucharest, I received a letter signed by the rectors of the four universities in Timișoara in which they proposed we form a union of all universities in Romania with the purpose of defending ourselves against any such repressive future actions. I called for solidarity among all universities, and my call

was positively answered to. The >>University Solidarity<< is the first civic force of opposition in Romania comprised of all academic elites. It was born in the amphitheater of the Faculty of Mineralogy, which I was managing. Not only representatives of universities were part of this, but also representatives of the creative unions. It was an agglomeration of Romanian elites. Soon after, all the universities in Romania adhered to the >>University Solidarity<<. Together with other civic bodies such as the AFDPR²⁴, the >>15th November<< Association in Braşov²⁵, CADA²⁶, GDS²⁷, or the >>21st December 1989<< Association²⁸, the >>University Solidarity<< proposed we unify in a Civic Alliance. Although it was decided to be a union of civic societies, the Civic Alliance was formed through personal individual enrolment. We asked a friend of ours working for a newspaper to publish a document signed by approximately 100 of us. It was a call for a meeting in the Revolution Square in Bucharest, as we were not permitted to enter the University Square. We had no clue if tens or hundreds of people would show up, or if a repressive intervention was planned against us. We did not know what to expect! We organized this with the League of Students. A huge number of people showed up. As the Revolution Square was filling up and to show the magnitude of peoples' adherence to our movement, we decided to leave in a march across Bucharest. This is how we could avoid the usual manipulation through television, where the authorities would spread some

²⁴ AFDPR – The Association of the Former Political Detainees in Romania.

²⁵ The '15th November' Association – An association focused on the commemoration and memorialization of the anti-Communist rebellion which took place in Braşov on 15th November 1987.

²⁶ CADA – The Action Committee for the Democratization of the Army.

²⁷ GDS (The Group for Social Dialogue) – Romanian NGO developed in January 1990 with the purpose of defending democracy, civil liberties, and human rights.

²⁸ The '21st December 1989' Association – An association of individuals who actively took part in the 1989 Revolution.

figures around. Almost 500,000 participants joined, which set a new balance of power. During this march, people started calling my name for presidency. I said I could not become a president like this and that we must have democratic elections.'

Having made sense of actions he initiated before his election as the President of Romania for the democratization of the nation, Mr. Constantinescu continues attributing meaning to the investigated topic by narrating further actions he took as a democratically elected head of state. In so doing, he brings together the theme of personal assumption of responsibility and that of the persistence of the Communist apparatus in post-1989 Romania. He openly accuses President Ion Iliescu of surrounding himself with former cadres of the Communist Party and secret police in his presidential mandates after the 1989 Revolution. Mr. Constantinescu makes sense of this aspect by contrasting the governmental apparatus under President Iliescu to the apparatus under his own mandate when former cadres of the Communist Party and Securitate were replaced by members of the intellectual elite and former political prisoners. References to purposefully naming former political prisoners as head of the SRI – the Romanian Intelligence Service, the successors of the Securitate – and Minister of Information add symbolic strength to his meaning-making process. His intense emotional involvement in the topic is expressed in a mix of imperative remarks and rhetorical questions:

'When I became a president, I replaced absolutely all previous counselors with others mostly from the academic environment. From day one I stated clearly that no one who had previously worked in the Securitate, cooperated with the Securitate, been a member of the Communist nomenclature, or a Communist activist would not be hired in the

presidential apparatus. There is a published study showing how the apparatus under President Iliescu was full of former Communists, then my apparatus had zero former Communists, and then again President Iliescu brought them into action. I lost a few well-trained men this way, but principles are principles. I also asked for the backgrounds of the leaders of the National Bank and secret services to be verified. [...] So, in our government, we had rectors of the main universities and leaders of scientific institutes. That was the first technocratic government of Romania. Only elites in their fields and none of them was accused of corruption! Of course, the manipulation was heavily used against me, and I was accused that I no longer support a possible Law of Lustration. However, my actions, such as the establishment of the CNSAS²⁹, prove the truth! [...] The first time former political prisoners occupied leading state roles was during my mandate. The gross manipulation still states that political prisoners never got any important roles in the state, but this is not true! All the national lists of candidates for the Democratic Convention had to be signed by me, as the president of this body. I insisted former political prisoners be selected in leading roles, thus in the 1996 Parliament were 35 former political prisoners in key roles! A former political prisoner was in charge of the Commission for the Supervision of the SRI – the former Securitate – for four years! What more can one ask for?! Former political prisoners had the second and third most important roles in the state: president of Senate and president of the Chamber of

²⁹ CNSAS – The National Council for Studies in the Archives of the Securitate.

Deputies! I appointed a former political prisoner – who had been tortured in Aiud – as Minister of Information!’

Mr. Constantinescu continues attributing meaning to the investigated topic by delving deeper into the themes of personal assumption of responsibility and continuation of Communist elements in contemporary Romania. He feels the need to mention three projects – the transformation of the former Jilava Prison in a memorial museum and educational center targeted at educators and high-school students; the development of the ‘Aripi’ (‘Wings’) monument in Bucharest for the commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime; an alternative manual for high-school studies on the history of Communism in Romania. Mr. Constantinescu presents these initiatives as a moral responsibility he has to the former political prisoners. To add dramatism and meaning to the narrative, he contrasts his projects for the memorialization of the victims of the Communist regime to purposeful initiatives for censoring this side of history by former elements of the Communist apparatus or their successors. In making sense of this aspect, he openly accuses President Ion Iliescu, President Traian Băsescu³⁰, and Professor Vladimir Tismăneanu³¹ of refusing to acknowledge and condemn the crimes of the Communist regime because they were closely connected to it. To express his perception, he uses a mix of harsh language such as ‘filthy’ and irony such as ‘comrades’:

‘The first delegation I received at the Presidential Palace once I became president was that of the AFDPR. I then met with them every two weeks or monthly. In our first meeting,

³⁰ Traian Băsescu – President of Romania (2004-2014).

³¹ Vladimir Tismăneanu – Romanian political scientist, Professor at the University of Maryland, US.

they mentioned they do not seek privileges and positions, but to support me on the tough path of economic reforms, in the integration of Romania in NATO and the EU. They said they are interested in two things: the popularization of the historical truth about the Communist crimes, and how the memory of their actions will be preserved and presented. That is when they asked me to develop a monument and a memorial. I gave them my word, and I am still fighting for this as we speak, with projects such as Jilava and >>Aripi<<. [...] The new alternative school manual on the history of Communism in Romania was my initiative for which we obtained European funds. For a long time, many opposed such a project because many of those still teaching history in schools were formed by and part of the Communist system. There were dangerous tendencies, for example, Tismăneanu. His family was part of the Communist nomenclature, so he had no interest to talk about the crimes. When he wrote that filthy interview with President Iliescu, they found each other in an extraordinary empathy; they were delighted to remember their comrades. We have to show a minimum understanding towards Presidents Iliescu or Bănescu and others who were raised within the Securitate. Those who were >>bandits who had to be liquidated<< to them were >>heroes<< to me. These things do not change in a generation or two.'

Mr. Constantinescu continues his meaning-making process by sketching a portrait of the post-1989 Romanian society. In so doing, he emphasizes perceived positive effects the 1989 Revolution and the change of political regime brought, such as 'independence', 'freedom', 'integrity', security, and relative economic stability. His focus on democracy, freedom, and integrity reveals a personality which places these values at its core. He makes sense of this aspect by contrasting such principles to a corrupt and morally

decaying Romanian society which he perceives as an effect of persisting elements and practices from the Communist regime. To this, he opposes the perceived morality and integrity of the former political prisoners whom he promotes as role models for the moral regeneration of the nation:

'Today's Romania is in real and measurable progress. This progress is linked to vital issues of our entire history. It is for the first time in its history when the Romanian nation has its independence, freedom, and integrity secured. Romania has never been better militarily protected by a big power. But, of course, freedom and integrity are like health: when you have them, you take them for granted. The second aspect is democracy. Romania is not in a political crisis. The democratic institutions exist, but it took a couple of decades for them to start working. We cannot say we do not live in a democratic regime, with its own flaws. Neither are we in an economic crisis like other European nations have experienced. According to EU calculations, we have the highest economic growth for two years in a row. Then we ask ourselves: why this generalized state of discontent? Because Romania is going through a profound moral crisis. This is caused by the abandonment of moral values and scarcity of role models. Through perverse propaganda, moral role models have been removed. This is what we need! [...] What is the big drama? What have the Communists managed to do? After the war, it was the same issue of those who got rich due to the war. For one to enter such a wealthy respectable family, he had to learn to behave like them. Thanks to this the system has not degraded much. After Communism, one had to learn the behaviors of those who got rich on the back of the regime, and this led to the decay of the people. Within lies the moral drama of the Romanian society. Before, people condemned the snobbism of wealthy people. At least snobbism spreads

some positive values. But today's model is the thug, the ill-bred. The society is paying the price for this. [...] His moral sounds like this: >>the end does not justify the means<<. I respected this throughout my life. And we should all learn this from former political prisoners.'

After thoroughly detailing the perceived persistence of cogs of the Communist apparatus in the societal mechanism of modern-day Romania, Mr. Constantinescu tackles this aspect by linking it with the theme of justice in the context of the recent sentencing of former prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. He emphasizes the importance of such judicial acts to the moral regeneration of the Romanian society. This focus on morals is expressed through 'symbolical condemnation' and the repetition of 'righteousness', while his strong belief in the importance of educating the youth about the history of Communist crimes is visible in the repetition of 'future generations'. Mr. Constantinescu adds dramatism and meaning to the narrative by contrasting the crimes committed by Communist authorities to the good standard of living of the perpetrators:

'A symbolical condemnation is important! The purpose is not vengeance. It is imperative for future generations to know such actions are condemnable. Barbarity and cruelty are recurrent. Future generations must know such actions are not tolerated, and they are harshly punishable. Not only was there a lack of action for the last 26 years against those who committed these crimes, but they were defyingly rewarded with huge pensions. The former political detainees were defied precisely by their torturers! There is a difference between justice and righteousness! Justice is an instrument for achieving righteousness.'

In one of my previous speeches, I openly asked for the condemnation of the Communist ideology.'

When referring precisely to the Sighet Memorial Museum, Mr. Constantinescu mentions he has been taking his students to the Maramureş County for more than 30 years. The fact that he feels the need to mention this reveals a sustained identitarian connection with Sighet and its surroundings. His narrative focus is on the Communists' purposeful attempts to imprison the intellectual elites in the Sighet Prison to reshape the fiber of the Romanian society. This is expressed through frequent repetitions of 'destroy memory', 'break the connection to the past', 'destroy identity', and 'create the New Man'. The perceived nature of Communism is voiced in statements such as 'diabolical planning', 'barbarian ideological project', and 'monstrous attempts'. By meaningful contrast, Mr. Constantinescu praises the existence of the Sighet Memorial Museum as a tool for identitarian awakening by filling in the memorial gap the Communists tried to create. His strong emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed in a series of exclamatory remarks:

'I was accustomed to Sighet. As a geologist for more than 30 years, I spent at least one month every year with my students in Maramureş. [...] Sighet was a special case in the ex-Communist realm. No other nation had a prison designated to the intellectual elites. The goal was clear: to destroy the memory of the Romanian nation! If you destroy a man's memory, you destroy his identity! A person who has lost his memory does not exist anymore as an individual. A nation who have lost their memory does not exist anymore! So, the memory of Romania had to be destroyed to create the New Man! It was diabolical

planning! In Sighet they broke the connection to the past, while in Pitești they re-educated the students through torture to abjure their past, their families, their faith to create the New Man. This is the past that people must be shown! Romania should be in the frontline for condemning the Communist ideology because we can show that in the name of this ideology such a barbarian ideological project was initiated! An ideology created these monstrous attempts for breaking the connection to the past. This is how the idea for the Sighet Memorial came into being. I was chosen as the president of the Civic Academy, but Ana Blandiana and her husband took over when I left for the US. They did exceptional work. They organized conferences. Then we helped obtain the needed funds.'

While praising its existence, Mr. Constantinescu is critical of the museal interpretation at the Sighet Memorial Museum, more precisely of the renovation of the original building. He makes sense of this aspect by contrasting it to the *in situ* nature of the Jilava Memorial project, whose perceived educational impact on the young visitors lies precisely in its original state. Mr. Constantinescu also chooses to make sense of the Sighet Memorial by placing it in the context of present-day discussions for the development of a museum focused on the history of the Communist regime. As one of the initiators of this project, he discloses the agreed name of the new establishment:

'I would not like to comment on the interpretation, for my comment may upset Ana Blandiana. Our relations are not what they used to be. But I can tell you that, when I decided to launch the Jilava project, I worked with the AFDPR. All the former political prisoners told me they do not wish Jilava to be like Sighet; they want it to be as it really was. For this reason, we want to keep Jilava as terrible as it was in those days. Without

beautifying it! You must put yourself in the mind of the youth who will visit this memorial. [...] We want to develop a network to include Sighet, Pitești, Râmnicu Sărat, and Jilava. For this new museum we agreed on a new name and removed the word >>national<<: The Museum of Communist Political Detention.'

Mr. Constantinescu continues making sense of the Sighet Memorial by reconfirming the perceived transformational importance of such institutions. His focus remains on the moral regeneration of the society, as seen by the frequent repetition of 'values' and 'moral'. Among these values, he emphasizes truth and freedom throughout the interview. For a declared Christian like Mr. Constantinescu, this is presumed to hold deeper meanings, as Truth and Freedom are the fundamental driving forces and life goals for Christian believers. To make sense of this aspect, he brings back the major theme of assumption of responsibility which he tackles from different perspective: the personal assumption of responsibility for living according to values and resisting temptation at all costs; the individual assumption of responsibility for educating young generations about the values promoted by the former political prisoners; and the societal assumption of responsibility for their dark and painful moments of history. Mr. Constantinescu's high emotional involvement and strong belief in this topic are expressed in a series of imperative statements:

'Such memorials can recreate points of reference which comprise the values certain people were able to fight for and the people who were able to fight for such values. Using these values as references involves different stages. You may not know them, and you are in total chaos. You may know them and not adhere to them. You may know them and

adhere to them. You can take them upon yourself without assuming responsibility for them. The last stage is to resist once you have assumed responsibility for them, sometimes at the expense of your freedom or life. This is what a memorial shows you! And it shows that retrieval of memory through truth can enable one to reach a certain moral ideal that some of the political prisoners also managed to reach. A moral self-accomplishment which enabled them to make unimaginable gestures. People need reference points, but our current reference point is abyssal. [...] We cannot deny history, as it was. We must take it upon ourselves and assume responsibility for it. A nation and group become believable when they can speak about their own crimes and atrocities, not about the other's. [...] Youngsters must be taught a culture of peace, not the culture of war and conflict promoted in the media nowadays.'

In the same line, Mr. Constantinescu feels the need to reiterate the importance of memorial museums such as Sighet once more. He makes sense of this aspect by praising those who chose to suffer or die in the Communist prisons or during the 1989 Revolution in the name of values, especially in the name of freedom. The reference to the revolutionaries' slogan 'we will die, and we will be free' adds dramatism and texture to the narrative. Again, he brings back the theme of personal assumption of responsibility by detailing the episode of his apologies to the victims of the Communist regime and Holocaust on behalf of the Romanian nation. The emphasis on this episode implies the victims of Communist and Nazi regimes should be given equal consideration. His focus remains on the moral regenerative function of memorials over young generations of Romanians due to a metaphysical aspect of what he calls 'spiritual memory':

'There are two lines. One is memory – forgetfulness – anguish; the other is memory – historical truth – accomplishment. If we manage to rebuild memory, we give back dignity to the Romanian nation. We have trampled our own history; we have some exceptional examples of dignity and moral resistance against one of the most repressive regimes. We have also trampled the memory of those who took to the streets in Timișoara on 21st December 1989. They showed they are willing to risk their lives for values. They did not ask for salary raises or better statutes, they called for freedom, free elections! >>We will die, and we will be free<< was among the wonderful spontaneous slogans in Timișoara! They should be the heroes, not what the TV stations are promoting nowadays! And, for this reason, we need a Memorial! Why a Memorial?! Because there is a difference between historical recognition – I did my duty as a president to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the Romanian nation for the crimes of the Communist regime and for the Holocaust – and spiritual memory which involves certain types of emotion. The effect of a memorial over the youth is much stronger than the effect of a text or a presidential declaration.'

- **Portrait Number 3: Mr. Vasile Ciolpan**

Relevance to Study: Commander of the Sighet Penitentiary (1950 – 1955).

When asked about his background, Mr. Vasile Ciolpan mentions growing up in a poor peasant family and the demise of his father when he was 13. He also mentions professing as a woodcutter until he was recruited in the army, where he fought on the

Eastern Front between March and June 1944. Regarding education, he speaks of three years of primary school and the three-month Communist Party school for cadres. In 1947 he joined the Communist Party, and in 1948 he was responsible with regional agitation and propaganda. Within three years of joining the Party, on 1st May 1950, he was appointed director at the Sighet Penitentiary for political prisoners, and one month later his military rank was upgraded to major lieutenant. Thus, Mr. Ciolpan's meaning-making process counterbalances his perceived hard life before the Communists against his fast progress in profession and status under the Communist regime. In fact, these contrasting life stages reveal themselves as the foundation of Mr. Ciolpan's sense-making process. He presents his joining of the Communist Party as a life-changing decision and his period as the Commander of the Sighet Penitentiary as the peak of his life.

On several occasions, he repeats an idea which eventually becomes the leitmotif of the interview: all the negative things which happened at the Sighet Penitentiary during his time as Commander was the result of orders he received from his superiors, thus he bears no responsibility. His genuinely perceived lack of responsibility for the prison conditions and treatment of inmates is visible in the frequent repetition of statements such as 'I was told', 'I was not allowed', or 'I was ordered'. Adding dramatism to his sense-making are references to burying the deceased prisoners in collective, secret and unmarked graves for which records were purposefully not kept. This treatment contravenes the strong symbolic and ritualistic meanings Christian Romanians attach to the Death phenomenon which are meant to ensure the eternal rest of the deceased's body and the smooth passing of the soul into the Heavens:

'I was told a special regime has to be in place at the Sighet Penitentiary: 3,200 calories for daily alimentation, 10 minutes of open-air walk every day per prisoner, they are not allowed to communicate to each other, they are not allowed to receive letters, parcels, they are not allowed to introduce themselves to wardens or other prisoners. They no longer had an identity, just a prisoner number, and cell number. [...] Initially I could not comprehend this, but these were the orders they gave me. [...] I was not allowed to write any death certificates. I was also not allowed to mark their locations in any way. [...] I was ordered to keep secrecy about those deceased. They were to be buried in places no one else was to know about. The burial places were to be masked so they would never be identified.'

In other instances, he associates prisoners' lack of resistance and subsequent demise in the Sighet Prison with their old age or low physical and mental condition. His perceived lack of responsibility is reinforced in such instances where he depicts inmates' death as natural happenings which he could not have influenced:

'They had a very poor mental state. That was the situation; I could not change it. [...] They died of the diagnosis mention by the doctor, I could not diagnose any of them. [...] Many were not able to eat because they were old men.'

Beyond placing all the responsibility for the treatment of political prisoners on the orders received from superiors, Mr. Ciolpan makes sense of this topic by arguing that all that happened was a context he found himself in without the ability to influence it. This deeply felt belief is revealed through the repetition of 'situation':

'I felt I entered a situation I should not have put myself in. But now it was too late already. [...] Many abusive things – from top to bottom – took place in those days. Such was the situation. And some people around here respected ordered word by word, without questioning them. [...] When one of them died, I announced it to the Direction for Penitentiaries in Bucharest. We would say >>the light bulb in cell # went off<<. We could not say the names of the deceased under any circumstance. This was the situation.'

One clear example of admitting to harsh treatment of prisoners in the Sighet Penitentiary is that of Ion Mihalache's confinement in the 'black' cell. This was a punishment cell without windows, light, fresh air, where prisoners had to sleep on the concrete floor under increased humidity and decreased nutrition. While admitting it, Mr. Ciolpan does not assume responsibility for this decision even if he was the prison commander at the time:

'Once they interrogated Mihalache and he ended up spending three days in the >>black<< cell. Why? I could not say. It was decided by the interrogation squad. [...] There was no window and almost no air. Only through the space under the door. It was hard for them. When this guy, Mihalache, was locked in the >>black<< cell, I found him on the cell floor with his mouth by the door.'

Although not assuming any responsibility for harmful actions against political prisoners at Sighet, Mr. Ciolpan assumes full personal responsibility for alleged favorable decisions for the detainees. The prison conditions depicted throughout his meaning-making are in stark contrast with prisoners' memorial books and historical research which

speak of hunger in the Sighet Prison as both a permanent unbearable experience and a systematic instrument of torture and extermination³²:

'They received milk daily, meat every three days, I had a contract with a local grocery for many vegetables, even for butter. [...] They got beef, toast, pork. This is the regime I made for them. I am telling you the truth. [...] With a content soul I am telling you that such was the regime: they received food four times per day. [...] At 10 o'clock we gave them milk or coffee with milk or a slice of toast with butter and jam. I am telling you they were very well nourished.'

This dual measure regarding the assumption of responsibility between negative and positive narrated actions towards the political prisoners in clearly evident is statements such as those below. He speaks of the need for wooden planks for coffins, of a prisoner's suicide attempts, and of Gheorghe Tătărescu³³'s intense bleeding and subsequent demise as facts outside of his control and responsibility, but he assumes responsibility for alleged support towards improving the detainees' situation. Just like in the case of the prison diet, the medical situation inside the Sighet Prison general and the

³² For a historical synthesis of the prisoners' diet at the Sighet Penitentiary: Dobeş & Ciupea (2003). The Greek-Catholic bishop Ioan Ploscaru describes his experience in the Sighet Prison: 'The most terrible torture in the Sighet dungeon was the hunger. [...] The diet in this prison was carefully calculated for the prisoner to not die immediately, but to become gradually weaker through starvation' (cited in Dobeş & Ciupea, 2003, p.264-265). Professor Ioan Nistor also depicts the inmates' diet in Sighet: 'The prisoners' diet was as insufficient as it could be. Each of them received 250g of bread to last for the entire day. [...] All of us lost weight dramatically. My weight was 50 kg.' (cited in Dobeş & Ciupea, 2003, p.264).

³³ Gheorghe Tătărescu – former Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of War of Romania, member of the Romanian Academy, and important member of the National Liberal Party.

case of Gheorghe Tătărescu in particular presented by Mr Ciolpan is in stark contrast with the testimonies of former prisoners or historians³⁴:

'I told my superiors they had not allocated any wooden planks to me, so I had to beg for such planks to the local factory to make coffins for them. [...] I tried to man up some of them. For example, one of them tried to commit suicide three times. He may have been some sort of a minister. I discovered his attempts and tried to man him up. However, in the end, he managed to hang himself. [...] The doctor could not have opened the medicine locker without my permission. We had plenty of medicine, which one could not have found in the drug stores. I remember Tătărescu, at some point, was bleeding from all orifices. When I saw him, I got scared and quickly called the doctor. He gave him injections, but Tătărescu passed away.'

³⁴ 'Medicine is useless, we should allow nature to work' is line often repeated by the former doctor at the Sighet Penitentiary (cited in Dobeş & Ciupea, 2003, p. 270). Former political prisoner Ioan Ploscaru describes the scarce medical care at the Sighet Penitentiary: 'Those were the laws of extermination prisons. Usually, the dying prisoners were taken to the rooms on the lower floors for surveillance but also to transport them easier to the cemetery. Their shouts tore up the silence of the night, with shades of pain, despair or agony. Sometimes you heard them for two-three nights in a row, then it was quiet. The torment was over.' (cited in Dobeş & Ciupea, 2003, p. 270-271). Another former political prisoner, General Gheorghe Mihail, details the medical situation at the Sighet Prison: 'The medical support was illusory, and the medicine was inexistent. The most frequent afflictions were caused by malnutrition, which led to loss of weight, the >>melting<< of muscles, extreme weakness, gingivitis, teeth falling out, heart, liver or kidney diseases, intestinal affections and ulcers. [...] Petechial fever is also present because of the omnipresent lice. Many suffer from mental disorders, neurosis, psychosis, nightmares, schizophrenia, delirium, insomnia, mental instability.' (cited in Dobeş & Ciupea, 2003, p. 270-271). Camil Demetrescu – former Romanian diplomat imprisoned at the Sighet Penitentiary – witnessed and depicts the treatment Gheorghe Tătărescu which led to his subsequent demise: 'When Tătărescu got ill, the doctor refused to enter his cell and said: >>You must be crazy to ask for my medical visit. All I will only enter your cell when I can confirm your death.<< When he had a severe bladder crisis, he asked for medical treatment. The prison commander came into the cell and kicked him in the stomach. He asked the prison doctor to give Tătărescu some medicine. The doctor entered the cell, kicked Tătărescu with his boot in the stomach, and only then he gave him medicine.' (in a video interview realised by Iulia Hossu-Longin).

While portraying himself as a benefactor of the political prisoners, Mr Ciolpan refers to illustrious political and spiritual figures of Romania imprisoned at Sighet – Iuliu Maniu³⁵, Constantin I.C. Brătianu³⁶, Ion Mihalache³⁷, Gheorghe Tătărescu, Alexandru Todea³⁸, Alexandru Rațiu³⁹, or Ioan Popovici⁴⁰ – as ‘*this guy*’ or by using only their family name. This critically reveals his lack of consideration for them years after the change of regime. A lack of remorse for the prison conditions of members of the Romanian elite – most of them senior citizens – is also revealed throughout his meaning-making when portraying prison labor, suffering, and demise in a serene and sometimes humorous tone. Mr. Ciolpan’s employs a duplicitous attribution of meaning to the discussed topic. On the one hand, he argues the prisoners’ memorial writings on the harsh prison conditions are distorted. On the other hand, he sees inmates managing to be alive at the end of their prison time as a matter of luck:

‘This guy, Todea, who is now a bishop, was placed in the prison working teams, so he had to sweep the floors and other things. Another one, Rațiu, wrote a book but did not write the entire truth about the conditions in prison. [...] A guy called Popovici, a very old general, was lucky to get home alive. [...] If I remember correctly, Maniu was brought

³⁵ Iuliu Maniu – former Prime-minister of Romania, founder of the National Peasants’ Party, important role in the unification of Transylvania with Romania on 1st December 1918, deceased in 1953 in the Sighet Prison.

³⁶ Constantin I.C. Brătianu – former President of the National Liberal Party and Minister of Finance, deceased in the Sighet Penitentiary in 1950.

³⁷ Ion Mihalache – former minister in different governments, Vice-president of the National Peasants’ Party.

³⁸ Alexandru Todea – Cardinal of the Greek-Catholic Church and member of the Romanian Academy.

³⁹ Alexandru Rațiu – Greek-Catholic priest.

⁴⁰ Ioan Popovici – general in the Romanian Army, deceased in the Sighet Penitentiary in 1953.

blindfolded to the Sighet Prison in 1952. He was very ill, poor guy. [...] One of them – from the Brătianu family with a long beard up to his waist but cannot remember which one of them - passed away on the first night. We asked ourselves when he entered a coma: what do we do with the body if he dies? We decided to remove the body.'

Already mentioned before, the theme of a fulfilled duty and content conscience reoccurs on several other occasions in Mr. Ciolpan's sense-making process. Throughout the interview, he links his lack of remorse to having followed orders, to the poor condition of the prisoners, and to an overall context he found himself in. The duplicitous meaning-making omnipresent throughout the interview is summarized in the statements below where regret-free accounts allow for glimpses of penitence and compassion:

'I can tell you: I fulfilled my duty as a human being, as a soul of a kind human, as I was pitying them sometimes. [...] I have a clean conscience. I may have made some mistakes; I do not know. But I have a clean conscience and always have a relaxed sleep. I fulfilled my duty as a human being, not as a terrorist or a commander who did all sort of [bad] things.'

- **Portrait Number 4: Mrs. Trifoi**

Relevance to Study: Wife of Mr. Grigore Trifoi, former warden and chief of the section for political prisoners at the Sighet Penitentiary between 1953 and 1961.

Upon hearing the topic of current research, Mrs. Trifoi mentions her husband worked as a warden at the Sighet Penitentiary and that his first commander was Vasile Ciolpan. She then states her husband had finished four years of primary school, and that they had lived on insufficient financial means as peasants. To this, she adds the national hardships Romanians were facing at the time under Hungarian occupation:

'Before the Communists came to power, the Hungarians were here. They allocated certain amounts of food per family. We had to speak Hungarian in schools.'

In her meaning-making process, Mrs. Trifoi contrasts such hardships with their improved lives in the first stage of Communist rule, under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej⁴¹. On 6th July 1953, her husband was employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, given the rank of corporal, and appointed as chief of section at the Sighet Penitentiary. Thus, she attributes an ontological transformational meaning to the initial stage of the Communists' assumption of power when their status and living conditions dramatically improved. References of the prison staff receiving improved food and medical care are contrasted

⁴¹ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej – The first Communist leader of Romania (1947-1965). General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (1944-1965).

by memorial works and historical research talking about starvation in the Sighet Prison as a systematic instrument of extermination⁴². The narrative gains further dramatism through the antithesis between the prison staff and their families partying inside the prison while seeing the inmates:

‘They sent him to the warden school at the Jilava Prison in Bucharest. Then they sent him to work at the Sighet Penitentiary. [...] He became a warden at age 23. [...] The salaries were small, 400, and divided into two instalments. He received 1 kg of bread per day and 1 kg of meat every Saturday. They also received oil, sugar, cheese, and jam. [...] Several times they organized parties for the cadres and their families, so I could see the political prisoners walking in circles in the backyard. [...] They had a doctor and nurse in prison. We got medical treatment at the prison. [...] During Dej we had everything we needed, during Ceaușescu⁴³ we had nothing.’

Following such statements, Mrs. Trifoi feels the need to stress that her husband’s appreciation of the Communists was real rather than interest-based. She makes sense of this aspect by repeatedly paraphrasing her husband’s affectionate familial perception of the first Communist leader of Romania and narrating his deep sorrow at the leader’s demise:

⁴² For example, Giurescu (1994) and Dobeș & Ciupe (2003).

⁴³ Nicolae Ceaușescu – President of Romania (1974-1989). General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (1965-1989).

'When Dej got ill, my husband came home and told me: >>our daddy is sick!<<. This is how he called Dej: >>our daddy<<. He really believed in Communism and in Dej. He was very upset when he died. Very, very upset.'

As she advances in this sense-making process, Mrs. Trifoi employs humor and laughs in several instances when depicting the torturous and morbid behavior of prison wardens. Such narratives of torment, humiliation, and death cheerfully expressed reveal a lack of remorse and add grotesque dramatism to the meaning-making process:

'The commissar ordered they be sent to the >>black<< cell. They were chained down by a hook, while the floor was full of water. They kept them like this for 3-4 days. They gave them no food, only salted water to make them thirsty. My husband told me that, when they were released, the prisoners were so harmless that he could insert his finger in their mouths. [...] My husband removed one dead prisoner at night by horse and cart. There was a lot of water, and the coffin could not be lowered. So, they had coffins! One other warden, a big guy, went to a nearby house and broke a piece of the fence to push down the coffin. The house owner got out and shouted at the warden, who ran away. Everyone laughed to see a big guy with a rifle on his back running like this!'

One recurring theme throughout the interview is the profile of the prison commander, Vasile Ciolpan. At first, she mentions the close connection between her and his families. In so doing, she reveals details about nepotism and insufficient training in the recruitment and employment mechanism. When portraying the prison commander as a kind person, Mrs. Trifoi's meaning-making is focused on his treatment of subordinates and familial relationships:

'My husband's father was a friend of Ciolpan's. Very good friends. So, Ciolpan asked my father-in-law if he does not have a son to be trained as military cadre. My husband had just been liberated from the army. So Ciolpan sent my husband to school, to Jilava. He did not stay long, as they urgently needed cadres. [...] For some time, Ciolpan was my neighbor and we visited each other. We helped each other. He was a very kind and quiet man. He was very understanding with his subordinates. A very calculated man.'

In several instances, Mrs. Trifoi attempts to deny the accusations generally brought against Vasile Ciolpan, but, in so doing, achieves the opposite result by revealing the harsh treatment prisoners were subjected to during his time as commander. The focus of her meaning-making is not the poor diet and living conditions of the prisoners, on the violence they were subjected to, or on the fact that inmates' families knew nothing about them for years, but on defending the prison commander in such instances. Such a sense-making process is presumed to have its roots in previously mentioned perceptions of Vasile Ciolpan offering her husband the warden job which dramatically improved their status and living conditions. The mix of lack of remorse, serenity, humor, and passionate speech employed when narrating such instances adds further grotesque meanings to the interview:

'Do not believe stories that he stole the food destined to the prisoners; he did not need to do this! What did the prisoners eat?! I will tell you! They [the prison staff] went to the abattoir for meat and brought back hooves and cow heads. That was the meat of the prisoners. My husband told me about this. They gave them gruel porridge, a kind of flour boiled in water. That is all! What could have Ciolpan stolen?! He had his own food. [...]

Prisoners died of old age. And maybe the food was not good, and there was little air. [...] I do not know of the wardens beating up the prisoners. They had other prisoners to do the beatings. These prisoners would beat up the others, push them down the stairs. [...] One political prisoner offered wealth to my husband if agreeing to pass a message to his family, to let his family know his whereabouts. For six years his family had not received any news about him. He refused for fear of losing his job. It could have been a test of his loyalty.'

One other recurring theme in Mrs. Trifoi's narrative is the complete secrecy surrounding the treatment of political prisoners at the Sighet Penitentiary. The example of deceased prisoners removed and buried in complete secrecy in unmarked graves adds dramatic meanings to the narrative through the filter of the strong symbolism and rituals surrounding the death phenomenon in Christian Orthodox tradition. Even more dramatism is added by the mentioning of a leading Romanian politician with substantial contributions to the unification of Transylvania with Romania in 1918 being subjected to the same treatment:

'He was telling me a few things, but he was forbidden to speak about what took place in the prison. [...] Everything related to the prison was extremely secret. [...] They made coffins out of wooden planks. They made coffins at daytime and removed the bodies at night-time. They buried them in that place where Iuliu Maniu is buried. They removed them at night because absolutely no one should have known that someone died in prison and their burial place.'

At different moments throughout the interview, Mrs. Trifoi uses a different tone to make sense of the discussed topic. In instances which allow for glimpses of respect and compassion, she speaks about the respectful behavior of the political prisoners towards the prison staff which she associates to their high level of education. The contrast between the depicted profiles of the inmates, their perceived unjust convictions, and the way she previously made sense of the treatment of prisoners in the Sighet Penitentiary adds dramatism to the meaning-making process:

'The priests and dignitaries behaved very nicely with the wardens. They would not curse the wardens; they were highly educated. [...] About the priests and dignitaries my husband told me they were imprisoned with no guilt, without having harmed anyone.'

One story Mrs. Trifoi purposefully emphasizes in both detail and enthusiasm revolves around a spiritual gesture. Praying for the deceased is a fundamental ritual for Orthodox Christians with strong archaic symbols which are believed to help the soul's purification from sin and its smooth passage into the afterworld. Her emphasis on her husband secretly allowing prayers against the official Communist purge of faith reveals a compassionate aspect which is in stark contrast with previously narrated treatments of prisoners. Mr. and Mrs. Trifoi's enthusiasm about this particular event critically reveals their unaltered Christian core:

'My husband worked in the section for political prisoners. He saw all the dignitaries brought to the prison. There were also many priests among them. The Communists did not like faith. Among the prisoners, many were old and ill men. One night a prisoner passed away. His cellmate asked my husband to let him pray for the deceased overnight.'

My husband agreed but told that prisoner to tell absolutely no one – especially the commander or the political commissar – about this. [...] They thanked my husband for allowing him to pray for the deceased. My husband told me that never before and never after has he heard such prayers as those in the cell!’

- **Portrait Number 5: Mrs. Ana Blandiana**

Relevance to Study: Founder of the Sighet Memorial Museum. President of the Civic Academy Foundation.

Mrs. Blandiana begins her meaning-making process on the investigated topic by mentioning childhood memories of her father’s imprisonment by the Communists and his subsequent demise because of the treatment he was subjected to in prison. She feels the need to extrapolate the constant familial state of fear to the entire Romanian society. The fact that she mentions her birth and upbringing in the realm of the Communist prisons for political detainees reveals a perceived ontological transformation through the interaction with this world of political prisoners:

‘I can say I was close to the phenomenon of the Communist political prisons since I was born. I remember witnessing the first arrest of my dad. He was arrested on several occasions. He was only convicted once for seven years and died soon after. They would sometimes take him in, keep him for some time and let him go. In our house just like in

many other houses of our friends there was always a prepared suitcase, just in case they came to arrest the master of the house. This is the atmosphere I grew up in.'

The transformational role the encounters with former political prisoners had on her upcoming meaning and decision-making processes is explicitly acknowledged and assumed in narratives of meeting one of the most important Romanian political figures. Her sense-making reveals the meetings with Corneliu Coposu⁴⁴ had a direct influence on Mrs. Blandiana's subsequent decision to develop the Sighet Museum. In her perception, Corneliu Coposu's attempts to change history through politics mirrors her attempts to change history through the Sighet Museum:

'The drama of my life was meeting Corneliu Coposu. The impression he made on me was so strong and positive! What impressed me the most about him was his understanding of time. [...] Compared to everything he had been through, all the suffering, these political struggles were small concerns. He had an extraordinary ability to distance himself from history while, at the same time, attempting to change history.'

She connects such memories of familial dramas to her purge as a writer. This perceived personal drama is perceived to be strong considering she begins the statement by existentially defining herself as a writer. She makes sense of her perceived nature of the Communist regime by repeating words such as 'banned', 'propaganda', 'censorship', 'surveillance', or 'arrested'. The repetition of such words sheds light on the importance

⁴⁴ Corneliu Coposu - Founding member of the National Peasants' Party. Arrested in 1947, he spent 17 years in Communist prisons – including the Sighet Prison - and forced residence.

Mrs. Blandiana places on freedom of expression. Emphasizing her father's arrest for being a priest reveals the Christian spiritual aspect of her upbringing. Through this Christian lens, her strive for freedom of expression gains strong metaphysical meanings considering Freedom is both the fundamental human condition and the ultimate life goal for any Christian believer. The reference to being allowed to publish again due to international pressures is one of several instances where she expresses the importance of international support for securing her freedom of expression:

'First and foremost, I am a writer. I have 32 published books, translations in 24 foreign languages, multiple awards in Romania and abroad. I was banned as a writer three times. The first time between 1959 for four years. I was a student, and I published two poems in a newspaper in Cluj. My father was a priest and had already been arrested for >>propaganda against the state<<. An announcement was issued across the country that I am the daughter of an >>enemy of the people<<. Then I managed to publish but had to find ways to fight against censorship. In 1985 I was banned for the second time for publishing four poems in a school magazine. The magazine was immediately banned, and its directors fired. Due to international pressures, I was allowed to publish again after a few weeks, but I was under strict surveillance and censorship. [...] The third time my children's book was banned, and the chief of Securitate asked for all issues of this book to be removed from bookstores. I almost had no connection left with anyone.'

She speaks again of the importance of international support when referring to the development of the Sighet Memorial. Statements of former political prisoners living abroad financing the initial stages of the Sighet Memorial subtly expose the state of affairs

in post-1989 Romania. In a private discussion, Mrs. Blandiana mentioned they depended on private funds because the socio-political stage in the years after the 1989 Revolution was still heavily dominated by former elements of the Communist apparatus. The spiritual nature of her thinking is visible in her perception of international support as a godsend. This perception gains further meaning and strength considering some of the most repressive actions of the Communist Party had been aimed at the eradication of the Christian institutions and belief system:

'The first important step is persuading the European Council to vouch for and support the project. We were protected this way. [...] Meeting Catharine Lalumière⁴⁵ was the work of a little angel. [...] We opened offices of the Civic Academy in places outside of Romania where former political detainees had relocated. They funded the beginnings of the Memorial.'

Two statements reveal Mrs. Blandiana's perceived fight in the name of freedom of expression as a moral assumption of responsibility of a divine and ontological nature. They gain deeper meanings considering Freedom and Truth are two of the fundamental driving forces and aspirations for Christian believers. These accounts reinforce the profound Christian aspect of her thinking, where her life-long struggle and courage in the name of freedom of expression resemble Christ's carrying of the sacrificial Cross:

⁴⁵ Catherine Lalumière – former Secretary General of the Council of Europe between 1989 and 1994 and member of the European Parliament.

'My duty was to write what I believe in. It was a sacred duty and the only purpose of my life. [...] Without my belief in God I would not have achieved anything. I am not superstitious, but I have the absolute belief that I am protected. This explains my lack of fear and risky decisions.'

A theme arising at different moments in the discussion is the large-scale societal unawareness of the history and memory of Communist totalitarianism as the driving force behind Mrs. Blandiana's decision to enter politics and initiate the Sighet memorial project. This reveals the perceived educational function of the Sighet Museum and the developers' pioneering role in researching, interpreting, and spreading awareness about the topic:

'Everything that had happened before 1989 was mostly known to those who had directly experienced it. Both the suffering and the resistance remained largely unknown to the general public. [...] Each particular room required a proper study because no one had researched any of these topics. No studies or maps had been developed. We soon realized we were living in a closed circle and regular people had no idea of this side of history. [...] The objective of the projects we have here is for as many people as possible to find out what the Communist repression actually was.'

Throughout the interview, Mrs. Blandiana goes more in-depth in explaining this lack of societal awareness. She makes sense of it by linking it to another major theme of the discussion: the continuation of the pre-1989 system into contemporary Romania. One way she attributes meaning to this theme is by repeatedly referring to the student movement in 1990 which called for former Communist cadres to be excluded from newly-developed democratic institutions. The students' violent repression is depicted as a

decisive point in Mrs. Blandiana's decision to initiate the Sighet memorial project. She makes sense of the former Communist cadres who are still in power by attributing them concepts such as 'corruption', 'oppressor', 'propaganda' and 'manipulation', and refers to the effects of Communism on contemporary Romania as 'residues'. In her perception, the persistence of such Communist individuals, values, and practices has deterred the Romanian society from developing according to the hopes, needs, and expectations of the 1989 Revolution and 1990 student movement:

'Having spoken to the students gathered in the Revolution Square in 1990, I soon realized that we were back in the pre-1989 political atmosphere. [...] When the miners came and committed the atrocious actions against the students, we got the idea to call for a public meeting in support of the arrested and killed students. We were sure only a few tens of people would show up. Hundreds of thousands of people came. That was the beginning! We realized the collective hope, and this is how the Civic Alliance was born. It lasted for ten years. We helped some people win the elections, but soon we realized that nothing had really changed. The children and heirs of the ex-Communist leaders were still dominating the country. Nowadays it is still the same, but the network has shifted from political to corruption-based. [...] These acknowledgments made us conclude that the change must be attempted on much deeper levels by first trying to find out what has brought us to this level. [...] So, the purpose became to understand what happened, how and why it happened, and what the residual effects are on present-day society. [...] It is clear that what slows down and disrupts our development are the residues of those repressive years, including the residues in each individual. Plus, we must look at those in power. While the former political prisoners are passing away at an accelerated rate, the

oppressors and their children are still controlling the nation and its wealth; they still have the same type of power as before. They have a tremendous experience in propaganda and manipulation.'

Going deeper in the narrative of deliberate censorship of memorial projects through manipulation and propaganda by former Communist cadres, Mrs. Blandiana narrates the issues she has faced after announcing the development of the Sighet Memorial. She also speaks of present-day deliberate attempts by the authorities for distorting history with the effect of identitarian dilution. Her strong emotional involvement is visible through imperative remarks and the use of subjective concepts such as 'terrible' or 'unacceptable':

'The morning after publicly announcing the project for the Sighet Memorial, the huge title of the >>Vocea Romaniei<< newspaper – one of the voices of the government – was >>The Sacrilege in Sighet<<. The subtitle was >>Ana Blandiana sells the suffering of Romanians to the Council of Europe<<. That was a terrible period, we were being attacked from all sides. [...] There is a recent initiative to change the curriculum for high-school and combine history with civic education. This is unacceptable! The young generations are so confused that they cannot even associate themselves with a people anymore!'

In the same line, she feels the need to share the sustained censoring pressures put on the Sighet Museum developers by the two main branches of the Romanian Christian Church. The fact that Mrs. Blandiana spends a considerable amount of time and detail narrating this aspect reconfirms the profound Christian nature of her meaning-making

process. The contrasting narrative of the relationship between the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic clergy pre- and post-Communism reveals a perceived wealth-driven decadence which – in the context of the entire interview – she extrapolates to large parts of the post-1989 Romanian society. The repetition of her father's figure in the context of the conflict between the two denominations reveals a strong emotional involvement in this perceived interpretive drama at the Sighet Memorial. This involvement is reinforced through imperative and accusatory remarks:

'Deciding on the interpretation in the museum was and still is the hardest part due to various pressures. We have been strongly attacked from both left and right political wings on the one hand, and from both the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches on the other hand. This dispute between the Churches is tearing me apart. Not only because my dad was a priest and his best friend was a Greek-Catholic priest who died in prison. My dad – an orthodox priest – used to say that >>the abolishment of the Greek-Catholic Church is only useful to the Communists<<. So back then they understood this. Nowadays, neither side understands this anymore. They suffered together in prison and developed good connections. Since they got out, they started fighting for wealth, it all comes down to this. This is never ending! The Orthodox Church accuse me that I betray the memory of my father when I put the Orthodox Church side by side with the Catholic Church. The Greek-Catholic Church accuse us of putting them side by side with the Orthodox Church, since there were only Catholic priests imprisoned in Sighet. Neither of them gave us any help or support! When we sought the support of the Orthodox Patriarchy, we were informed that they could not help us because those who suffered in prison did not suffer for Christ,

but for their political ideas. They are absolutely shameless! The Catholic Metropolitan Seat in Blaj did not even send us a reply!’

The difficulties in putting together the museographic interpretation constitute a significant theme throughout Mrs. Blandiana’s meaning-making. Besides the aspects of censorship previously discussed, she mentions moral hardships of depicting human suffering. She chooses to exemplify this in the context of the process of re-education through torture which took place at the Pitești Prison between 1949-1951. She expresses moral difficulties and dilemmas through a series of rhetorical questions:

‘What happened in Pitești is unimaginable to a normal mind. In this experience, almost all were victims and aggressors. This was the hardest exhibition to put together. How should we depict the facts?! Who are we to judge or interpret those actions?! We cannot possibly know how we would have reacted in those same situations. So, we decided to only include direct quotes from those who directly experienced Pitești.’

Having detailed such pressures and censoring efforts, Mrs. Blandiana feels the need to emphasize their reaction to such attempts. Her statement reinforces the existential importance she attaches to freedom of expression, and gain deep metaphysical meanings considering the aforementioned symbolism of Freedom and Truth for Christian believers:

‘Some accused us of including some far-right groups, while the far-right wing accused us of not respecting them more. We refused to be politically correct and chose to depict all of the groups who participated in the armed anti-Communist resistance, no matter their political affiliation.’

One other means Mrs. Blandiana employs for making sense of the investigated topic is arguments for the importance of memorial initiatives focused on the victims of Communist totalitarianism, such as the Sighet Memorial. She emphasizes their moral and identitarian transformational function on visitors, especially on young visitors. This perception is given extra strength by previous references to present-day political attempts at diluting national identity and censoring sensitive aspects of the national history, also by remarks aiming at the moral decay of modern Romanian society:

'The people need something to hold on to, some role models, and these could only be writers, actors and other non-politicians. [...] The important aspect of Sighet it that many young visitors come out with a luminous face because they had encountered the life stories of people who deserve their respect. [...] Not forgetting this side of history allows us to better understand the present. [...] The young people should learn this history to understand their own lives. Not knowing the real history of their nation, they do not know much about themselves.'

Mrs. Blandiana reinforces the need for the moral regeneration of the Romanian society by linking it to the recent sentencing of former Communist prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. For a declared Christian such as Mrs. Blandiana, such a judicial act is assumed to gain deep metaphysical meanings considering Justice is a fundamental pillar of the Christian faith which proposes that souls are allowed entrance into the Heavens based on their worldly deeds:

'No one is happy to see an old man going to prison. The issue is that our country remains covered in shame if such moral reparations are not conducted.'

Having already defined herself as existentially a writer, Mrs. Blandiana makes sense of the Sighet Memorial by placing it on a similar level of personal importance as her literary creations. The adjoined temporal mention critically reveals a strong emotional involvement:

‘The Sighet Memorial is almost as important to me as my books. I have given it 20-something years of my life.’

Mrs. Blandiana also feels the need to mention her support for the recent governmental initiatives of developing a museum dedicated to the repressive Communist system in the capital city. However, she expresses her discontent with the developers of the new museum ignoring the existence of the Sighet Museum. Her use of ‘unfair’ and the imperative remark reveal a strong emotional involvement in the topic:

‘The government should definitely develop a new museum dedicated to Communist crimes in the capital city. What is unfair is when those who keep talking about say that Romania does not have such a museum yet!’

- **Portrait Number 6: Mr. Romulus Rusan**

Relevance to Study: Director of the International Centre for Studies on Communism. Founder of the Sighet Memorial Museum.

Mr. Rusan begins making sense of the investigated topic by thoroughly narrating his personal and familial hardships under the Communist regime. Intimate stories of his

own struggles to obtain education because of his social origin expose a deeply felt identitarian connection with the theme of Communist repression. This is reinforced by narratives of his father, relatives, and professors being arrested by the Communist authorities. Considering Mr. Rusan's subsequent involvement in projects focused on the popularization of the Communist authoritarianism such as the Sighet Memorial Museum, his chosen approach to beginning his meaning-making process exposes an ontological transformation brought to his life by the direct interaction with the universe of political repression in his early formative years. His repeated references to the reunification of what became colloquially known as Great Romania in 1918 and the mentioning of being born in Alba-Iulia – which is also the place where the 1918 reunification took place – critically reveals a twofold attribution of meaning. Firstly, it exposes a perceived identitarian connection with the site of what is collectively perceived as the most significant historical achievement of modern Romania. Secondly, making such references in the context of Communist repression reveals a strong link with what is known as the greatest historical drama of modern Romania: the territorial rupture of what became the independent nation of Moldova under Russian influence. His emphasis on the terror surrounding Stalin's death adds further dramatism to his meaning-making process:

'I was born on 13th March 1935 in Alba-Iulia. I went to the Mihai Viteazul High-school which had been established after the Great Union of 1918. During the war, it was turned into a hospital. Many of our professors who had been part of the previous regime were fired – some arrested – by the Communists. My father was arrested in 1948 until 1956. The managers of the high-school were kind people, and they covered up my background. A professor knew the history of my family. My grandfather had been an Orthodox

archpriest; he took part in the Great Union of 1918. He was highly respected in the local community and. Based on this respect, the professor in my school covered up my identity. My obligation was to have very high grades. Back then the familial background of a youngster was primordial. I graduated in 1952. In case I was not accepted for university studies, a bad background meant I would be sent to the battalions for hard labor. Based on my dossier my university applications were rejected. So, I was sent to work in a factory for abrasive materials. For one year I worked as a nighttime stoker. In secret, I would sometimes attend evening classes at different universities. In this context, I found out about the death of Stalin: 5th March 1953. I usually napped at work, but, on that day, I was scared that I would say something about Stalin in my sleep. People would not speak out or show too much emotion in those days. It was an extraordinary terror! The next day a large gathering was organized in the city center. Some people were arrested for laughing when the death of Stalin was announced. An order was issued for all the churches to toll their bells in commemoration, even if Stalin had persecuted believers. I also had one relative arrested for a few hours on the pretext of laughing at the death of Stalin. Later, I found a rector at the Faculty of Mechanics who knew my family and agreed to enroll me secretly. He even gave me a scholarship but conditioned my enrolment on maintaining the highest grades. Indeed, I finished my undergraduate studies with straight As.'

Another aspect Mr. Rusan feels the need to narrate is that of meeting and marrying Ana Blandiana. His focus on similar struggles for obtaining education and work because of their familial connection to former political prisoners exposes a perceived shared identitarian destiny. The sequence of imperative sentences referring to the Communists'

attempts to separate them and to their decision to marry in secrecy reveals a perception of their love for each other as an act of disobedience against Communist repression. Mr. Rusan's remarks about seeking jobs where they could express themselves freely expose a personality which places freedom of expression at its core:

'I met Ana Blandiana, and we got married. She made her literary debut for the >>Tribuna<< magazine. Her father had also been imprisoned by the Communists, so she had to write under a pseudonym. After some time, people realized who she was and that her father had been a political prisoner. The Communists sent a notification to all universities and literary magazines informing them about her. In the end, she could no longer publish in >>Tribuna<<. They even warned me against marrying her! They also told her to break up with me, or she would destroy me! So, we ended up marrying in secrecy in 1960! Then she had to do low-level jobs. She was a bricklayer for a while. Her applications for university were rejected for four years, but she was finally accepted. She graduated the top of her class, but still, she was rejected a job in the city. So, we left for Bucharest and got jobs for a student magazine called >>Viața Studențească<< [>>The Student Life<<]. We were privileged with the freedom of interviewing whomever we wanted. The censors were not interested in reading this magazine.'

Mr. Rusan continues making sense of the investigated topic by adding further shades to the couple portrait of him and Ana Blandiana. He provides an intimate, emotional, and dramatic representation of their life together by contrasting existential words such as 'hardships', 'tested', 'difficult', 'given up', 'desperation', and 'tired', to others such as 'encourage', 'overcome', 'faith', 'hope', 'love', and 'keep on fighting'. His

choice of words reinforces the perception of a shared identitarian destiny whose pinnacle is represented by the development of the Sighet Memorial Museum. The repetition of ‘faith’ and ‘God’ reveal his perception of meeting Ana Blandiana and developing the Sighet Museum as walking on a predetermined divine path:

‘Since our marriage, we have been together for better or worse. We have both had a life full of hardships – social, political, professional, extraordinary – but we always managed to encourage each other and overcome everything. God tested our faith and hope but always helped us in the end. We could not be saved without faith in God, hope, and love. The same is happening with the Sighet Memorial. We started it without realizing how long and difficult this process would be. We never believed we would need to do everything by ourselves. Being together, we encouraged each other and never looked back. On the way, there were moments when we would have given up because of desperation had we not encouraged each other to keep on fighting. It has really been a fight during which either one or the other got tired or wanted to give up.’

In the same line, Mr. Rusan presents the Sighet Memorial Museum as the ultimate accomplishment of his and Ana Blandiana’s love for each other by metaphorically referring to the Memorial as their grownup ‘child’. His choice of words such as ‘responsible’, ‘tied’, ‘engaged’, ‘married’, and sustained lifelong ‘thoughts’, ‘worries’, ‘plans’, ‘exaltations’, and ‘anguishes’ exposes Mr. Rusan’s perception of their couple destiny existing in an identitarian relationship with the Sighet Memorial Museum. This institution is presented as the meeting point between their personal, familial, and national destinies:

'I look at the Sighet Memorial with the feeling that Ana Blandiana and I raised a child who does not belong to us anymore. It is now on its own feet, it is visited by hundreds of thousands of people, it is appreciated and sometimes criticized, but we are still responsible for everything it does. In a way, we are tied, engaged, married for the second time through this child who reached adulthood. We think about it day after day, night after night, from a 650 kilometer-distance which amplifies our thoughts, worries, and plans for future. Physical distance dilates both the exaltations and the anguishes.'

Having spoken about the struggles they have experienced while developing the Sighet Memorial Museum, Mr. Rusan feels the need to further explain this aspect by linking it to another major theme of his meaning-making process: the persistence of former Communist individuals and practices in the contemporary Romanian society. The financially corrupt nature of these individuals is expressed through 'opportunists' and 'privatizations [...] based on social origin', while their morally corrupt nature is expressed through the repetition of 'defy' in regard to 'democracy' and 'victims'. To make further sense of this theme of continuity, Mr. Rusan intertwines it with the theme of justice. He speaks of the purposeful lack of proper judicial acts against those Communist authorities – emotionally referred to as 'torturers' - who committed repressive acts against fellow Romanians. References to the accelerated pace of demise among both the victims and perpetrators add dramatism to his meaning-making. The mentioning of the Berlin Wall adds further scale and dramatism to the narrative as it has become an international symbol of forced ideological separation. For a Christian believer like Mr. Rusan, this focus on justice is assumed to hold deeper meanings as worldly judicial acts are seen as mirroring

the biblical concept of Final Judgement according to which the soul of the deceased will be granted access to the Heavens based on his or her earthly deeds:

'Many opportunists appeared from the former Communist cadres. All the privatizations post-1989 were done based on social origin, more precisely they were done by former Communist cadres and their relatives and friends. [...] It saddens me to see how we keep beating around the bush, while the former Communist nomenclaturists, their heirs, grandsons, rivals, and supporters move on laughing at the discord among Democrats. The former torturers move around confidently and defy democracy using its unlimited freedoms. [...] Although the Securitate is verbally condemned, nothing practical was ever done against them. Some arrogant torturers ended up openly defying their victims even after 1989. They all got into important state positions and businessmen. They gathered into a syndicate of an estimated 300,000 former cadres of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, while the AFDPR never had more than 150,000 members out of which only a few thousand are still alive. By now we have pretended to condemn the torturers of the Communist regime. Ticu Dumitrescu put together a list of more than 232 former Communist cadres who should be on trial. The whole process was prolonged and postponed repeatedly, so only a few of the 232 are still alive. Anyway, they all say that they have only done their duty. But just to make it clear: no country has convicted the crimes of Communist regimes! Not even Germany! Out of all of those who were shooting people for crossing the Berlin Wall, only a few were sentenced to minimum prison time. You should read Bukowski who shows the tacit understanding between the Occident and the Communist states. I believe it was an agreement at the end of the Cold War: we do not convict them, we replace and

marginalize them. For example, the former Stasi members were not allowed to have jobs in the public system, but they were free to do business.'

To the theme of the continuity of the Communist regime into the post-1989 Romanian society, Mr. Rusan opposes another fundamental theme of his meaning-making: the personal assumption of responsibility for initiatives aimed at countering the harmful effects of the aforementioned continuity. To make sense of this theme, he feels the need to detail the process leading to the establishment of the Sighet Memorial Museum, and the results of the research activity of the International Centre for Studies on Communism. His emphasis on having had to give up his career as a writer to dedicate himself entirely to the development of the Sighet Memorial adds dramatism and strength to his narrative. Mr. Rusan's emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed through the metaphorical comparison of this literary resignation to a 'suicide'. Having already detailed the censoring nature of the persistence of former Communist cadres in leading roles of the contemporary Romanian society, Mr. Rusan feels the need to highlight the fundamental role of international protection in taking the Sighet project to completion:

'The idea of developing the Sighet Memorial came in a moment of inspiration, which reached its completion more than ten years later. We knew of the infamous prison in Sighet where the elite of Romania had been exterminated, just like we knew of others such as Aiud, Gherla, Pitești, or Jilava. Due to the reputation of the Sighet Prison and its ruinous condition, we focused our project on this site. The idea was for all the 60 prison cells to be transformed in a museum of all the other 230 places of detention in Romania. Ana Blandiana forwarded the project to the Council of Europe who chose to take us under

their aegis. We never imagined the whole process would take 12 years; we always hoped to return to our profession as writers as soon as possible. As a writer, getting involved in the development of the Sighet Memorial meant my suicide! They were tough years, during which we had to learn to do everything: fundraising, building a database through the accumulation of oral and written history, developing each cell, planning the technical and technological aspects, transforming the cemetery into a park of memory. We organized summer schools attended by hundreds of young students every year, workshops, and seminars. At the International Centre for Studies on Communism we edited 20,000 pages of history, we printed 3,000 hours of testimonies and synthesized an equal number of individual destinies. We also opened a small version of the Memorial in Bucharest.'

One of the most important themes of Mr. Rusan's meaning-making process is the transformational effect of teaching young generations of Romanians the history of the Communist repression. This perceived transformational function is expressed through words such as 'birth', 'rebirth', and 'regeneration'. His focus is on the moral regeneration of the Romanian society, as suggested by concepts such as 'spirit', 'conscience', and 'self-perfection'. The repetition of the need for 'real' past and knowledge, together with references of 'hidden' history and 'avoid fundamental truths' expose Mr. Rusan's warning call about the scale and gravity of purposeful historical censorship and distortion. This perception is further expressed in contrasting dualities, such as history-political studies, facts-concepts, historical personalities-pseudo personalities, and people-civic society. The effects of such historical falsifications are given meaning through a mix of metaphors and medical notions, where he speaks of an 'era of amnesia', 'pathology of

memory’, and the ultimate ‘death of memory’. In turn, Mr. Rusan argues, such diseases of memory lead to an identitarian dilution and a moral and mental decay, as expressed in the repetition of ‘wooden language’ and of entertainment-fed youngsters’ superficial view of life:

‘Memory is a homeland for the spirit. Within its boundaries, between its landforms – events, chronologies, remarkable facts – the conscience of the individual, family, and nation exists. For a nation, memory is as important as physical birth. Through memory, a human is in a continuous process of regeneration, rebirth, and self-perfection. It is obvious that no action attempted by any of us can happen normally unless we are aware of what has happened before us. If we ignore our past, the road to the future is like groping around in the dark among obstacles we collide with because of our inability to predict. Unfortunately, the real past – especially the recent past – has been hidden to young generations for the last 60-70 years. The contemporary educational system gives students little chances to access real knowledge, because the school history books are very schematic, abstract, and avoid fundamental truths. They teach political studies instead of history. Facts are replaced by concepts. The great personalities of the past are replaced with VIPs of the contemporary political and entertainment scene. The >>people<< is replaced by an abstract >>civic society<< rooted more in the wooden language than in life itself. This way, after the demise of those who lived Communism on their own skin, young generations will no longer know what truly happened in the decades before them. The memory of young generations was destroyed! Professors and parents have also forgotten, due to living in the >>era of amnesia<< for the last 26 years. We are running the risk of becoming – from this post-1989 second generation – a nation without memory,

fed with entertainment, speaking a wooden language, who gives all its sensuality to the Internet. Practically, memory is left behind by the entertainment provided through all means of communication, by the youngsters' superficial view of life, and by their parents' hardships which turn memory into a matter of secondary importance. Professor Alexandru Zub mentioned we are living in a pathology of memory. What comes after this is the death of memory.'

A sequence of statements come as a synthesis of Mr. Rusan's meaning-making process on the investigated topic. He feels the need to detail the perceived nature of the 45-year Communist regime in Romania. His focus is on the rupture of the societal, moral, and cultural fiber of the Romanian nation. The intensity of this rupture is expressed in words such as 'brutal', 'crushed', 'savage', 'bloody', and 'terror', while its scale is suggested by the mention of two million victims. Mr. Rusan's emphasis on the 'traditionalist peasants' nation' and 'strong and profound belief in God' is important as these aspects represent the foundation of the archaic Romanian way of living and also the pillars of the fundamental belief for most Romanians: Freedom. Traditionally, owning land is believed to ensure earthly freedom, while believing in God is seen as providing spiritual freedom. Thus, as Mr. Rusan states, the abolishment of private property and the persecution of religious believers by the Communist authorities meant a rupture of the societal fabric from its archaic core. To this, he feels the need to add the corrupt and interest-driven nature of the post-1989 politicians. The narrative connection between the pre-1989 regime and the post-1989 political class hints to and reconfirms the theme of the persistence of Communist elements in the contemporary Romanian society. The reference to the sustained anti-Communist resistance among Romanians adds dramatism and

meaning to his narrative. Mr. Rusan also brings back the theme of personal assumption of responsibility for getting involved in projects aimed at the memorialization and commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime. He proposes the important role of the Sighet Memorial Museum for the identitarian and moral regeneration of the Romanian society by introducing young generations of Romanians to the history and values which has previously been denied to them. This perceived role is expressed in concepts such as ‘solid anchor’, ‘sign of gratitude’, and ‘sign of duty’. The narrative connection between the anti-Communist resistance before 1989 and their declared purpose for developing the Sighet Memorial Museum critically reveals their museographic initiative as a continuation of their predecessors’ resistance in the name of shared values. The statement ‘[t]here is no one left to tell today’s children what happened to this nation’ comes as a culmination of his entire meaning-making process on the investigated topic, and adds strong dramatism and meaning to his narrative:

‘For Romania, Communism meant a brutal exit from normality, from the traditional national way of living. Romanians were crushed by the enforcement of an extreme-left ideology. They had been a traditionalist peasants’ nation driven by a strong and profound belief in God. To this, we can add an antipathy towards the Russian Empire based on previous campaigns of occupation. As a result, Romanians opposed the Communist occupation – either the Red Army or Russia-protected authorities brought from Moscow – as much as they could. What followed was a savage and bloody terror, with almost two million Romanians arrested, deported, or used as slaves for forced labor. Plus, hundreds of thousands of captured soldiers were deported to Siberia. [...] In times when the rule of law is shaken by politics, populism, and corruption, memory is a solid anchor which

secures our place in history. This is the immediate and long-term role of the Sighet Memorial. We developed the Sighet Memorial as a sign of gratitude for the elderly who have had no youth and as a sign of duty to the youth who run the risk of not knowing who they are anymore, where they come from and where they are heading to. There is no one left to tell today's children what happened to this nation.'

- **Portrait Number 7: Mr. Robert Fürtös**

Relevance to Study: Museum curator at The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Sighet. Historian and researcher in the archives of the former Securitate.

Once the topic of investigation is introduced, Mr. Fürtös begins his sense-making by providing biographical information about events he perceives to have shaped his personality. His emphasis on the special interest in the Communist repression reveals an assumed and sustained emotional and professional connection to this field of research:

'My name is Robert Fürtös, and I am a museum curator at the Sighet Memorial. I graduated in history in Cluj. I specialized in recent history with a special interest in the Communist repression. I have been working here since July 1999. I have published a series of works on this topic.'

In another moment of the interview, Mr. Fürtös feels the need to add further details about his initial encounters with the topic of Communist repression and about his

beginnings as a researcher and museum curator. One detail he feels the need to mention is that he shares the same birthplace with Iuliu Maniu – one of the most important Romanian political figures who contributed decisively to the unification of Transylvania with Romania in 1918. Iuliu Maniu was tortured and died in the Sighet Prison in 1953, and his body was buried in a mass grave on the outskirts of the town. The narrative connection between the self, Iuliu Maniu, one of the fundamental books of memories of Communist repression, and Mr. Fürtös' subsequent work at the Sighet Memorial reveals a perceived identitarian connection with the site. It also exposes a deeply felt ontological transformation brought about by his initial interactions with the stories of detention under the Communist regime:

'I was still in high-school when I first came across the history of the Communist repression. I come from the same town Iuliu Maniu was born in. I came across Ion Ioanid's book >>Închisoarea Noastră Cea de Toate Zilele<< [>>Give Us Each Day Our Daily Prison<<]. I chose to enroll in the Faculty of History. At that time, my professors warned me that the access to the archives of the Communist regime is complicated. They told me it would be challenging to write my thesis on such topics. My research back then focused on the Pitești Phenomenon, and I tried to show that it was the Securitate who organized the whole process. Back then the access to the SRI archives was strictly discretionary; they would decide who goes in and what files one can see. I continued my research during the Master studies and ended up at the Sighet Memorial at the recommendation of two of my professors. Mrs. Blandiana and Mr. Rusan were searching for young specialists to take over some of the activities at the Memorial. Later, the access

to the archives became slightly easier. Before 2005 the archives were rather limited, but after this year more than two million files from SRI were opened to the public.'

Mr. Fürtös' emotional involvement in the topic is openly assumed when reflecting upon his inner self in the context of his historical research and is expressed through imperative statements. Although speaking about stories of suffering, Mr. Fürtös' attention is focused on instances of anti-Communist resistance which have shaped his personality:

'Each story is terrible in itself! While I was doing my field research in this area, I realized the oppression takes on different aspects and layers. First, it is the refusal of people to give their land up for collectivization, then it is the strong resistance of the Greek-Catholic Church, plus the direct armed resistance...all of this suffering affects you!'

His high emotional involvement in the topic is also visible in instances where he details sensitive moments he has experienced during his historical investigations. This high emotional loading and perceived inner struggles are expressed through a mix of subjective adjectives such as 'terrible', imperative statements and rhetorical questions:

'In some cases, the stories were so terrible that I chose to stop the recording, I could not make my interviewee relieve the suffering again. In other cases, I chose to go to the official documents after recording a testimony. I would see how distorted the official documents of the times were, aimed at meeting the authorities' purposes. [...] Then I noticed that some of those I was interviewing chose to cooperate with the authorities after their release from prison. You can imagine how hard it was for me to tackle such issues! Knowing what I know about this person, how should I phrase my questions?!'

Referring precisely to the Sighet Museum, Mr. Fürtös details different typologies of visitors he has observed over time. He makes sense of this aspect by contrasting the information-driven attitude of foreign visitors to the often emotion-driven reactions of Romanian visitors:

'In 2015, we had about 75,000 visitors. It is an ascending trend. We are by far the most visited museum in North-West Romania. Imagine the town of Sighet has 35,000 inhabitants! Normally, about 10-15% are foreign visitors. [...] The foreign visitors tend to be serious about their visits, they do not know much about these historical aspects and are very interested to find out. [...] The Romanian tourists are from different categories. Some are attracted by the idea of visiting a former prison. Some leave disappointed because they had been expecting something different. They say we have beautified the place and turned it into a hotel, and that it is not what it used to be during the 1950s. They expect blood and gore. Then we have those who actually do spend a couple of hours and carefully visit each section of the museum.'

One group of visitors Mr. Fürtös focuses on is the Romanian youth. He makes sense of this topic by contrasting a censoring school curriculum against the purposefully educational function of the Sighet Museum. His subjective implication in the topic is revealed through words such as 'sadly':

'Another group of Romanian visitors is the children and students who, sadly, seem to know less and less about the Communist times. It is not their fault, but the system's. There are too little history courses in schools, and I heard they plan to reduce them further. It is a new generation, and we must rethink our exhibitions to make them attractive to the

young audience. Once you have managed to catch their attention, they are very receptive. I noticed that youngsters connect very well to life stories.'

Two themes Mr. Fürtös adjoins at different moments throughout the interview are 'memory' and 'justice'. To make sense of the investigated topic, he employs these concepts in the context of the official motto of the Sighet Museum – 'Memory as a form of justice', and the recent sentencing of former prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. He feels the need to emphasize the continuation of elements of the Communist regime into the post-1989 Romania, and to imperatively argue for the morally regenerative role of judicial acts which sanction crimes against humanity. His emotional involvement in the topic is evident in exclamatory remarks and in words such as 'finally':

'Mrs. Blandiana came up with this motto in times when nothing was done within the judicial system to investigate the atrocities committed by the Communist regime. The former prison commander at Sighet died of good natural death in 2004, having been twice promoted in military rank by President Iliescu. Only in 2013 things started moving a bit towards investigating crimes against humanity and other abuses done during the Communist times. [...] This entire museum revolves around the concept of >>memory<< and keeping alive the memory of those times. However, memory is not enough; a certain moral reparation is needed. Finally, 26 years after the revolution one individual was trailed and convicted for the abuses he committed!'

Mr. Fürtös also addresses the topic of the continuation of elements of the Communist regime into contemporary Romania by mentioning a sustained issue he has

come across throughout his post-1989 historical research: the former political prisoners' suspicion and hesitancy to speak out. Privately, he mentions a generalized mistrust has become a feature of modern-day Romanian society. He sees this feature as an effect of decades of nationwide terror under the Communist regime when one's best friend could be an informant for the secret police:

'I experienced interviewees' mistrust and reluctance to speak to me. So, I always went recommended by someone close to that person.'

Mr. Fürtös brings the theme of 'memory' back into his meaning-making when detailing the perceived educational-transformational role of initiatives focused on the history of Communist repression on the Romanian society in general and the Romanian youth in particular. Having already indirectly expressed his admiration and respect for those who chose the path of resistance against the Communist repressive measures, Mr Fürtös purposefully and explicitly promotes them as role models for young audiences later in the interview. His chosen examples of resistance give symbolic strength to his meaning-making, as they revolve around the three fundamental pillars of Romanian life: family, land, and faith. The repetition of 'dignified' exposes a moral core of this proposed educational-transformational role:

'I believe this history can provide young people with real role models, rather than those promoted as models by today's media. I am not talking just about politicians who chose to die rather than give up their values. I am also talking about women who suffered because they refused to divorce, I am talking about farmers who suffered because they provided support to the resistance fighters or representatives of the clergy who never gave

up their faith. The young people should know they are coming from somewhere, that this nation had a dignified past and dignified people.'

Mr. Fürtös spends a considerable amount of detail making sense of the museal interpretation at the Sighet Museum. His criticism of the textual abundance reveals a balanced attitude. One theme he details in relation to the interpretation is that of censorship. He mentions instances of attempted censorship of specific historical topics by different interested groups and bluntly confirms historical censorship still exists in historical research and interpretation. His open and assumed tackling of sensitive historical topics both in his speech and in the museal interpretation exposes freedom of expression to be one of his fundamental beliefs. This gains further meaning considering Freedom is perceived as both the fundamental human nature and the ultimate life goal for Christian believers. Also, Christians believe that a life dedicated to Truth can ensure the passing of the deceased's soul into the Heavens:

'The presentation and interpretation are rather classic. There are documents – sometimes too much text in my opinion – and everything is based on a detailed archival research. What we have in place is a mix of chronology and thematic sub-themes. [...] There are some sensitive topics. As an institution, you must be careful not to be accused of taking sides. For example, we have an exhibition room focused on the repression against the Church in general. We have included the Greek-Catholic and Orthodox Churches. There are always questions about why we chose both, why we did not choose one over the others. The armed resistance is another sensitive topic, as some members of resistance groups were members of the Legionary Movement. Then we have the topic of the former

dignitaries who were imprisoned here, as some of them had also been members of Antonescu's government. There are also people who were accused of crimes against humanity, and these sentences are still active nowadays. As a museal institution, the Memorial must be careful about whose memory to preserve. It is very dangerous to blindly consider the convictions given in the 1950s. Each case must be considered in itself and the judgment placed after in-depth research and consideration. For some, the convictions are supported by facts, for others they can only be motivated ideologically. Yes, I can confirm that even nowadays there is self-censorship and a certain form of censorship!'

Having already acknowledged the need for interpretive means which can meet the needs of ever-changing young generations of Romanians, Mr. Fürtös extrapolates this need to the entire palette of modern-day visitors. In so doing, he adds another perspective to his portrayal of the post-1989 Romanian society:

'We must look around and see new developments in museum interpretation. You cannot use the same techniques you were using 30-40 years ago.'

His dedication to Freedom and Truth are obvious when he feels the need to take responsibility for all his opinions throughout the interview - even for those which may go against the official institutional view – and for his choice of getting involved in this field of work:

'I believe in doing anything as well as it can be done. I believe in self-respect, in continuous self-improvement, in balanced speech, in understanding others' views, in argumentative thinking, and in entering debates with people you can have debates with. [...] This is my personal view, and I assume responsibility for everything I say! It does

not represent the institution, and maybe Mrs. Blandiana has a completely different view. I believe that, even if you represent a certain institution, you can still hold a different view, not all of us should be aligned to the institutional view.'

Mr. Fürtös maintains the same blunt and sometimes critical tone when making sense of the topic in the context of recent public discussions for developing a Museum of Communist Crimes in the capital city. He openly criticizes the vanity of museum developers and the politicians' use of memorial projects for getting voters' support. His emphasis on museum developers not repeating what the Sighet Museum already presents is linked to a privately disclosed sadness of the Sighet developers for not having been consulted during the discussions for a new museum dedicated to the victims of the Communist regime:

'I believe there should be cooperation among developers, but currently, there is none. There should be no competition among these projects. There are too many vanities. [...] There is the recent project of a Museum of Communist Crimes, which I think it has long been needed in Bucharest. Those who are developing this museum must first agree on what they want to expose in this museum. If you want to do a Museum of Communist Crimes, you should consider not repeating what Sighet already has. Such a museum requires political support and funding. However, it should be the professionals who decide how the museum is done, and politicians should not use it as a hot topic during electoral campaigns.'

A sequence of statements towards the end of the interview where he explains what the Sighet Museum means to him come as a synthesis of Mr. Fürtös' meaning-making on

the investigated topic. More than a workplace, it is the place where his personal and national destinies are intermingled. In his perception, it is a place of individual and collective suffering, but also one of uncompromised resistance in the name of values which can lay the foundation for the moral regeneration of the nation. Lastly, it is a place which enables freedom of expression and multiple equally-valid opinions:

'It is my workplace. It is the place where an entire generation was destroyed. The Communists destroyed the elites. It is the place where certain people chose to go all the way for their political or religious beliefs. People who chose suffering over compromising their values. Many of them could have gotten out at any point had they rejected their values. Sighet is a place where the youth can learn, can get to know role models. Of course, this is my perception, but any colleagues of mine will most likely attribute different meanings to the memorial.'

- **Portrait Number 8: Mr. Norbert Kondrat**

Relevance to Study: Tour guide at the Sighet Memorial Museum.

Mr. Kondrat begins making sense of the investigated topic by narrating his existential transition from growing up under the Communist regime to becoming a tour guide at the Sighet Memorial Museum. The narrative connection between intimate childhood memories of queuing up for gas and food before the 1989 Revolution, remarks about obtaining his high-school education in Sighetu Marmăției, an emphasis on the

scarcity of information about the Communist repression, and his subsequent work as a tour guide at the Sighet Memorial Museum exposes Mr Kondrat's identitarian connection with Sighet and its history which produced an ontological transformation in his life:

'I remember queuing up with my parents for the gas and food quotas before 1989. I graduated from the >>Dragoș Vodă<< high-school in Sighetu Marmăției in 2001. In high-school, they taught me almost nothing about the history of Communist repression. In the first two years of my undergraduate studies in Cluj, I chose archaeology. Later, I switched to contemporary history. As part of my studies, I had to do a compulsory practice. They accepted me at the Sighet Memorial. One year later they advertised a tour guide job and asked me if I was interested. I have been working at the Sighet Memorial for almost 11 years.'

As his work as a tour guide becomes the leitmotif of his meaning-making process, Mr. Kondrat feels the need to detail his perception about the interpretation on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum and his approach to guiding visitors. By repetition, he confirms the museal interpretation to be a mixture of chronology and thematic points. The repeated use of statements about autonomy and censorship exposes a personality which perceives freedom of expression as a core value. The contrast between the perceived complete autonomy of working at the Sighet Memorial Museum and hints of different approaches to autonomy and censorship at other museal institutions adds strength to his narrative:

'I always tend to adapt my narrative to the visitors, according to their age, level of interest, and so on. It is a mixture of chronological and thematic narrative. Adapting is a

fundamental thing. [...] I think I have autonomy in presenting the story on display. Having listened to other colleagues of mine, I realized we have different ways of guiding and presenting the information. Of course, we follow the chronology or important thematic points of reference, but otherwise, we have autonomy. No one gave me certain pages of information to learn by heart. At the Sighet Memorial, I have not been censored at all, but this museum cannot change the perception over the entire nation.'

Having already emphasized the lack of historical education about the topics of Communist repression and crimes during his high-school times, Mr. Kondrat feels the need to attribute further meaning to this aspect. In so doing, he brings in the discussion another important theme of his meaning-making process: the persistence of individuals and practices from the Communist system in the contemporary Romanian society. The narrative connection between this continuity and his emphasis on '[e]ducators do not have autonomy' exposes his perception of deliberate attempts to censor history by authorities who were part of the Communist apparatus before 1989. His reference to 'harmful myths' found in 'history books [...] re-written during the Communist times' which are still used in Romanian school hint at purposeful attempts of distorting history. In his view, the effect of such censoring and distorting attempts is the dilution of national identity. Through the filter of such statements, Mr. Kondrat's choice of working as a tour guide at the Sighet Memorial Museum and teaching visitors about the history of Communist repression critically reveals an assumed mission of countering the purposeful scarcity of information on this topic in school history curriculum and supporting the regeneration of national identity. This is expressed through the imperative and absolutist remark '[e]specially young people absolutely must know this side of history!':

‘The history of Communist repression is not taught in schools because of a general lack of interest developed over the last 25 years. The methods and topics are the same as in the time of Ceaușescu, and so are many educators. [...] Educators in primary and secondary schools do not have the autonomy to choose what they teach. The curriculum is developed by the Ministry of Education. [...] We are already in the second generation who is not taught about the Communist regime and their crimes, so the fading national identity we are facing nowadays is understandable. [...] Especially young people absolutely must know this side of history! I would even say we should look at re-investigating history all the way back to the Middle Ages, as most history books were re-written during Communist times. So, they still include the same harmful myths.’

Mr. Kondrat continues making sense of this theme of educating young generations of Romanians about the history of Communist repression by detailing the typical reactions of young Romanians visiting the Sighet Memorial Museum. His perceived nature of the youngsters’ reactions to the historical interpretation on display is expressed in words such as ‘completely disinterested’, ‘very hard’, ‘do not even know’, and ‘few seem affected’. His emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed through a series of exclamatory remarks and subjective labels such as ‘these poor prisoners’. Another way of attributing meaning to this theme is by contrasting such typical reactions of disinterest to his declared interest of educating young Romanians by creating a strong feeling of compassion for the victims of the Communist regime. One other means of making sense of this educational theme is by opposing the young visitors disinterested and unaffected reactions to the reactions of middle-aged visitors who can connect to the displayed interpretation based on personal experiences before 1989:

'The youngsters – especially in primary and secondary school – seem completely disinterested. It is very difficult to make them feel how life in prison really was. Most of them do not even know where their educators brought them! They tend to take a couple of photos, and that is it! Few seem affected by what they see! The museum can show them certain aspects, but a one-hour visit cannot trigger a strong feeling of empathy for these poor prisoners who suffered here 60 years ago. The middle-aged visitors already know what I am talking about. Some lived through the Communist times or at least read more on the topic. They tend to come with their families, rather than on organized tours. Their reactions are usually something like >>I read about this but could not have imagined it was so bad!<<'

In the same line, Mr. Kondrat remains focused on the theme of educating young Romanians about the history of the Communist repression by linking their lack of knowledge and interest to his work as a tour guide at the Sighet Memorial Museum. His exclamatory reference to young Romanians not knowing who Iuliu Maniu is – one of the most important politicians of modern Romania with a fundamental role in the national reunification of 1918 – exposes his perceived magnitude and gravity of this scarcity of historical knowledge. Mr. Kondrat feels the need to emphasize the transformational role of memorial institutions such as the Sighet Memorial. To back this up, he chooses to detail his own inner transformation caused by the interaction with former political prisoners: increased compassion towards people in need, and decreased tolerance towards 'fake' people. The fact that he sutures his personal story to that of the Sighet Memorial Museum critically reconfirms his perceived identitarian connection to this memorial institution and the history it depicts. His perception of the Sighet Memorial's potential to broaden

horizons and develop critical thinkers is expressed in words such as ‘changing mentalities’, ‘opening people’s minds’, ‘seeing things from different perspectives’, ‘not believing a singular version of truth’, and ‘like to question [...] all aspects of everyday life’. Through the filter of these statements, Mr. Kondrat appears to perceive his guiding activities at the Sighet Memorial Museum not just as a job, but as an answer to a vocational and identitarian call. This is expressed in the statement: ‘I see this as my mission’:

‘The Sighet Memorial is a place for changing mentalities. Based on my interaction with former political prisoners and their stories I have much more empathy towards people in need and suffering. I also have greater antipathy towards fake people! Working with people is hard, but I see this as my mission: opening people’s minds to seeing things from different perspectives and to not believing a singular version of truth. One should like to question not just Communism, but all aspects of everyday life! It is hard to change the mentality of someone who visits the museum with an already settled mentality. Some come with an open mind, and those are good visits. But if people are absolutely disinterested - especially high-school students have no connection to the pre-1989 past and their parents have not told them anything about this - they just want to see the prison and are mostly interested in the shocking aspects. Many students have not even heard about Maniu!’

Mr. Kondrat continues to make sense of the Sighet Memorial Museum is by placing it in the context of similar museal initiatives in Romania. One way of doing this is by bringing back in the discussion the theme of the persistence of individuals from the former Communist Party in the decisional apparatus of post-1989 Romania. He associates

the lack of any other similar museal institutions to his perceived nature of these politicians, as expressed in words such as ‘absolute disinterest’, ‘interested in getting rich’, and ‘obtain state positions for business purposes’. Another way of attributing meaning to the Sighet Memorial is by linking it to contemporary societal debates about the need to develop a museum focused on the Communist regime in the capital city. While declaring his support for such initiatives, Mr. Kondrat feels the need to reconfirm the thematic complexity of the Sighet Memorial Museum. This need is critically assumed to hold deeper meanings considering his privately disclosed feelings of disappointment with the developers of the Sighet Museum being excluded from official discussions for the development of a new museum in Bucharest:

‘No other museums except for Sighet have been built after 1989 because of an absolute disinterest from the political class! Most politicians have been interested in getting rich, and they had nothing to earn from developing a museum. They obtain state positions for business purposes, not for improving the lives of the people. Plus, many used to cadres of the Communist regime. [...] A new museum is needed, especially in terms of accessibility. But I doubt a new museum could bring much new information compared to our museum.’

One other theme Mr. Kondrat tackles in his meaning-making on the investigated topic is that of justice. He chooses to do this by voicing his perception of the recent sentencing of the former Communist prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. His perception of Communism is expressed in words such as ‘crimes’ and ‘criminals’, while the repetition of ‘democratic’ exposes his view of judicial acts as a manifestation of freedom of expression brought about by the

change of regime in 1989. Mr. Kondrat's reference to 'different allegedly democratic governments' and his imperative call for also sentencing Mr. Ion Iliescu – the first democratic president of Romania after 1989, formerly a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party - hint to the theme of continuation of elements of the Communist system into the contemporary Romanian society. The repetition of 'shown to the people' reinforces the previously discussed educational function of museal and memorial institutions such as the Sighet Memorial Museum. Mr. Kondrat's emotional involvement in this theme is expressed in a series of exclamatory remarks:

'Of course, people like Vişinescu must be trialed and, if guilty, convicted! We should have started this 20-something years ago! We had different allegedly democratic governments over the last two decades. In this rhythm, they will convict Iliescu in 30 years! They must be condemned because the crimes of the regime must be shown to the people! We may get 60-70,000 visitors every year, but this cannot match the audience of certain TV stations. They must be convicted and shown to the people as criminals for confirming the worth of living in a democratic nation! It is still the best form of government mankind has been able to develop by now!'

- **Portrait Number 9: Mr. Ioan Ilban**

Relevance to Study: Former political prisoner in the Sighet Prison (1948-1951), President of the Sighet Office of the Association of Former Political Prisoners in Romania (present).

Mr. Ilban starts his sense-making on the topic by detailing youth memories of the context which led to the Communist authorities obtaining power in the Maramureş County. Having already revealed his perceived identitarian connection to Sighet by mentioning his birthplace to be a village in its close vicinity, Mr. Ilban adds a national emotional component to his narrative by repeating his enthusiasm with linguistic and territorial Romanian unity. To this, he contrasts the destabilizing and manipulative nature of the Soviet-imposed local authorities which he expresses in an ironic tone in remarks such as ‘supported by the Soviet Army’ or ‘he would tell people the signatures are for demanding peace’:

‘Let’s begin with the end of World War II. We were young back then, students in the early years of high-school. Northern Ardeal had been ceded to Hungary. As young students, we were looking forward to being part of Romania again so we could study in Romanian. At the end of World War 2, after the retreat of German and Hungarian troops, the Dragoş-Vodă high-school was re-opened in Sighet, and we were happy to study in Romanian again. Our joy did not last long, as in January-February 1945 – supported by the Soviet Army – a Ukrainian jurist was appointed prefect of Sighet. This prefect was trying to annex Maramureş to Subcarpathian Ukraine. To achieve this, he needed signatures from the local population for proving that the locals are demanding from Moscow for

Maramureş to be annexed to Ukraine. To obtain peoples' signatures, he would not actually disclose his real goal but fictitious ones. He would tell people the signatures are for demanding peace.'

If in the initial stage Mr. Ilban's anti-Communist attitude was subtly touched upon, later it was thoroughly and transparently assumed and made sense of. The repetition of 'freedom', 'independence' and their derivatives throughout the interview exposes Freedom as a central component of his personality and meaning and decision-making processes. This attitude gains further meaning considering Freedom is the fundamental driving force and life goal for Christian believers. The fact that Mr. Ilban attributes a divine meaning to his anti-Communist resistance and struggle for freedom is evident from the statement: 'They realized that Church and individual freedom are not possible in a Communist state.' The repetition of 'souls' reconfirms the deeply Christian personality of Mr. Ilban since the Bible proposes that a sustained fight for Freedom and Truth can ensure the salvation of the souls at the Final Judgement. It also exposes a strong and sustained emotional involvement in the topic rather than a rational decisional process:

'Meanwhile, people who had been imprisoned in the Soviet camps started returning to their homes and telling others what they had lived in the USSR, what Communism means, and what living in a Communist state involves. They realized that Church and individual freedom are not possible in a Communist state. The sphere of independence is very narrow. You cannot speak freely, you cannot act freely, you can only say and do what you are told and manipulated to say or do. This information reached our souls, and it was not according to our life ideals. We had a different kind of education: living in good

communion with your neighbor, colleague, friend, and so on. Naturally, the seeds of anti-Communist resistance bloomed in our souls.'

Having recollected the perceived reasons for his anti-Communist attitude, Mr. Ilban turns his attention to detailing his youthful acts of resistance. He portrays an antithetic image between the brutality and illegitimacy of the Communist authorities and the boyish defiant acts of high-school students. The fact that he recalls his mischievous acts of rebellion with humor and enthusiasm reveals little or no regrets for his decisions:

'Hoping for more signatures, the prefect invited us - the students - to a meeting. While he was addressing us, his people were going among the audience to raise signatures. [...] Some of the eldest ones realized the signatures were not for peace, but for being sent to Moscow and started spreading the news. My colleagues ripped apart the tables of signatures and threw them on the floor. We started jumping around and wanted to get out of the venue, but the doors were locked. Due to our numbers, we managed to open the doors and run back to our high-school, which we saw as a protecting fortress. [...] The elections in 1946 arrived: the Communist Party against the historical parties. We were too young to vote but tried to show our opposition to the introduction of Communism in Romania the way we could best. At daytime, the Communists spread election posters all over the town which we removed at night-time. We did not realize that our actions were being recorded. To increase the efficiency of our anti-Communist actions, we formed associations of students. We opposed the new style of education introduced in schools after the forged elections of 1946.'

The narrative tone becomes grave when Mr. Ilban remembers in detail the details of his arrest and initial days of imprisonment. The repetition of ‘students’ and ‘youth’ and the remark about the ‘summer holiday’ draws attention to the inoffensive nature of their rebellious acts in Mr. Ilban’s perception. Such remarks gain extra weight when contrasted against the brutal and repressive actions of the Communist authorities. The grave tone is intertwined with humorous and sarcastic remarks such as ‘They asked me what I did, and I said I did nothing’, or ‘I tried not to give them too much information’:

‘In 1948 the arrests of the youth began not just in Sighet, but all over the country. [...] So much youth was arrested in those days! [...] In August 1948, I was on summer holiday. On the night of 19-20 August 1948, after midnight, the Securitate in Sighet came to my village, surrounded my house, entered, took me out of my bed, asked me to get dressed, searched the entire house, turned everything upside down, and took me to their headquarters in Sighet. They locked me in a room in the cellar without giving me any explanations for two days. They started interrogating me. In our organization, we also had a professor who was arrested on the same day. They asked me what I did, and I said I did nothing. They took me to a different office where they also brought the professor, who had been seriously beaten up. The professor told me there is no point in denying the facts, as they already know everything about our organization. He had been shown documents about all of us and our activities. He agreed to confess to everything under the condition that they do not beat the students up. They sent me back to the cellar and kept interrogating me for the upcoming ten days. I tried not to give them too much information.’

The leitmotif of the interview is Mr. Ilban's personal imprisonment in the Sighet Prison. The tone becomes dramatic, and the emotional loading is presumed to be very high in instances where he depicts in detail the conditions of his time in prison. The vivid and recurrent references to hunger, cold, and humiliation expose deep meanings rooted in personal memories about violations of his basic human condition. The purposeful analogy between the political prisoners and pigs or dogs reveals deep emotional scars of feeling a diminished personal value because of the treatment he was objected to:

'On 29 August 1948, they brought us to the Sighet Penitentiary. We were the first batch of political prisoners in this penitentiary. We were imprisoned in cells on the second floor. I was imprisoned in cell 82 on the second floor, the second one on the left. The food was wretched, I think they were also trying to humiliate and make fun of us. I was given gruel - ground unfiltered corn boiled in water - the kind of food you feed to pigs or dogs. I could not eat it. I lost so much weight because of hunger during the upcoming weeks that I was getting dizzy when trying to get up. [...] The hunger, the cold, and the permanent stress ...the light in the cell was never switched off, we were under constant surveillance...this was our 1948-1949 winter! We lost so much weight, we were walking skeletons!'

Mr. Ilban's emotional involvement is presumed to reach its peak when he narrates his experience of turning 18 behind bars. For Romanians, one's 18th anniversary is a passage ritual from teenager to adult and the transition between a boy and a man. The contrast between the joyful and positive event this should have been for Mr. Ilban and the conditions of his imprisonment add dramatic meanings to his narrative:

'On 25 September I turned 18. The hunger was terrible, I could not even sleep. You felt hungry 24/7. I did not even realize it was my birthday as food was all I could think of. This is how I turned 18!'

As seen, one means Mr. Ilban employs to make sense of his imprisonment in the Sighet Prison is humor and sarcasm. This is evident when he narrates an anecdotic episode which resulted in his relocation to the punishment cell for 24 hours. The contrast between the boyish gesture of flirting with girls and the measures the Communist authorities took against Mr. Ilban adds symbolical meaning to his narrative:

'Upon our imprisonment, they warned us we are not allowed to look out the window. The windows were high up, to reach them one had to get up on a heater wannabe, actually a pipe which never got warm. One day I got up the pipe to look out the window. I was communicating with some girls I knew through signs, as I was not allowed to speak. The warden entered my cell and started shouting at me and asking me who was I speaking with. I kept denying I spoke to anyone. He then locked me up in the >>black<< cell. It was so filthy and dusty. I started knocking on the door for I could not breathe. The warden said if I keep knocking on the door he would tie me. I started feeling the ground with my foot and came across the hook and chain in the middle of the floor. They kept asking me who was I signing to, but I knew that any name I mention would lead to that person's arrest. They took me out of the >>black<< cell 24 hours later.'

The identitarian connection between Mr. Ilban and the Sighet Museum is brought into discussion in instances where he links his personal experiences in the Sighet Prison and their long-lasting effects on his personality with his involvement in designing the

museographic interpretation. Considering the sequence of statements, it is argued Mr. Ilban's narrated destiny is intimately and inescapably interlinked with the displayed interpretation at the Sighet Museum:

'In October they started grouping us two in a cell, as they kept arresting people. By the end of November, cold had already set in. We had no heating in the cells. They grouped us all – 18 people - in cell 74 between December 1948 and May 1949. I tried redesigning the exhibition as close to reality as possible, with the rusty broken beds, the so-called mattresses, two people per bed. We had no heating. Through the broken windows, snow came in and froze on the cell floor. We had to sleep back on back to get some warmth. Sometimes they took us for a short walk in the prison yard every two weeks or so. They took us for 2-3 rounds by the prison wall where the place for recollection is now. [...] You can imagine how much fear entered my heart during the 40-something years of Communism I lived through...and the way I lived them! The first time I entered this place again after 1990 – decades after liberation – I instinctively looked behind to see if the gates are not closing behind me.'

Mr. Ilban continues his sense-making on the topic by recollecting the conditions in the others prisons he has passed through during his imprisonment by the Communist authorities. Stories of forged trials, guards' abusive treatment and other difficult prison circumstances are narrated in laughter which reconfirms humor is one means Mr. Ilban employs for making sense of his past and the investigated topic. The analogy between the prisoners and cattle exposes his perceived diminished value of self because of the treatment he was subjected to in prison. His emphasis on the transformation of the former

Văcărești Monastery into a prison by the Communists gains meaning through the contrast between the calming and soul-comforting role of monasteries in Christian belief and the pain-inducing and soul-tormenting function under the Communist regime. This statement gains further meaning considering Mr. Ilban's aforementioned deeply Christian nature:

'In May 1949 they got us on a truck and transported us to the penitentiary in Satu Mare. The next day they got us on a train wagon which took us to Oradea. Other arrested students joined us in Oradea, and we were all sent to Cluj. [...] The Cluj Prison was so crowded, more than 100 convicts in a relatively small cell! No air, sweat, with no beds. There was not enough space to lie down on the floor and stretch your legs. Our trial was just a formality, and they started allocating years of prison to each of us. [...] I then got to Jilava Prison. When they removed us from the truck, we had to pass through a corridor of wardens with clubs. They were hitting us over the head and back all the way to the entrance of the prison. We were treated like cattle. The only window in the cell was closed, so we had little air. Because of the humidity, there were many leeches. [...] At the end of August, we were sent to the Văcărești Prison in Bucharest. It used to be a monastery, but the Communists turned it into a prison. I was so exhausted, I immediately fell asleep in the prison yard. It was one of the best sleeps I have ever had!'

Mr. Ilban feels the need to stress that not all the prison authorities treated the prisoners poorly. The appellative he uses for the prison commander at Târgșor Prison is 'moș'. Although this translates to 'old man' in English, Romanians use this word when affectionately referring to someone. This compassionate, grateful and forgiving attitude is closely linked to Mr. Ilban's profoundly Christian nature, as revealed by his reference

to paying respects to the dead. For Christians, paying respects to the grave of close acquaintances can ensure the smooth passing of their soul into the afterlife and eternal rest. This narrative moment gains dramatic meanings through the contrast between the joyful birthday in Târgșor Prison and his previously narrated 18th birthday in the Sighet Prison:

‘Târgșor also used to be a monastery turned into a prison by the Communists. In Târgșor we had better conditions due to the management of the prison not having been changed. The youth back then was different to the youth today. The honesty and righteousness were evident to everyone. Every three months we could receive a parcel of food from our families. Whenever we got something, we shared with the other prisoners. Plus, we were free to spend time in the prison yard. [...] On my birthday in 1949, I remember falling asleep on a pile of wood in the prison yard. I woke up with my prison mates singing happy birthday to me. I cannot forget such moments. [...] Old Man Dumitrache was the prison commander until 1950. He was so good to us that after 1989 we always paid respects to his grave.’

The narrative tone turns grave again in detailed narratives of his most difficult times: the program of forceful ‘re-education’ of political prisoners at the Gherla Prison. One way Mr. Ilban makes sense of these memories is through references to family. Instances of the almost tangible proximity of family members and home seen through the cell window expose a tormenting perception of the prison as forceful separation from one’s most important elements of the worldly life. Home and family are fundamental pillars of Romanian life with strong metaphysical meanings, values, and rituals attached.

Mr. Ilban's emotional involvement in this story is expressed through a series of imperative statements:

'I got to the Gherla Prison. They had already started the process of >>re-education<< through force. At some point, I felt I am bound to leave my bones here. A large room. Before reaching the large cell, I was imprisoned in a cell with prisoners from all over the country. This cell was facing the cemetery. Every day we saw women whose husbands were probably imprisoned at Gherla. They were pretending to light up candles in the cemetery, but their eyes were pointed at the prison cells in the hope of spotting out their husbands. One cellmate told me looking through the window to a village far away: >>do you know I can see the roof of my house from here? If only my parents knew I am here<<. I never met this man after, but I cannot forget this feeling he shared with me. He could see his house, his village! Our families had no idea about our fate, we had absolutely no correspondence! They did not know where we are, if we are still alive!'

In one instance he makes sense of the topic by detailing the dehumanizing effects of the 're-education' process in the Gherla Prison. His reference to the Pitești Prison where the process of 're-education' of student elites through torture had taken place adds dramatic meanings to his meaning-making. A similar effect is achieved through vivid recollections of torturous behavior one of his cellmates was subjected to. Mr. Ilban's emotional involvement in such recollections is assumed to be high considering his compassionate Christian nature:

'Soon a new guy is brought into our cell; he was one of those who lived the tortures in Pitești. He had already changed sides because of all the tortures he had been subjected

to. His role was to report on our discussions in the cell. One of us had a big mouth and started telling the others about his arrest and life before imprisonment. He was probably reported on by the re-educated cellmate. After a few more days two more convicts were brought in. First, they started questioning the chatty guy, then they put a sack over his head and began turning him around and hitting him badly. Blood started coming out through the sack. He shouted at first, but, at some point, he started laughing. That is when they stopped hitting him. The whole act had been planned by the prison authorities. They took him out of the cell, and we never saw him again. After many years we heard that he eventually lost his mind completely.'

Another narrative moment of high emotional loading is the detailed recollection of his own abuse in the Gherla Prison. Rich and intimate memories of personal suffering presumably trigger intense passions, as visible in the imperative statement 'I felt I would not walk out of this cell alive!':

'I was moved to the large cell, cell 101. [...] In this room we had to sit down from morning to night in one position, without the ability to support our body on anything. After one month I could no longer feel my bottom, legs, and spine. If we changed position any way, we got hit with clubs. To not be hit over the head, we stretched out our hands. After a while, we could no longer feel our palms. I felt I would not walk out of this cell alive! [...] After a month or so they took me to the pre-infirmary because of a disease in my lungs. Here I could at least move rather freely, and I am sure this is what saved me in the end. My conviction ended in February 1951, and I was actually liberated in May 1951.'

Mr. Ilban's profoundly Christian meaning-making is explicitly mentioned in references to prayers to God. The fact that he feels the need to narrate his prayers to God both inside and outside the prison critically suggests he perceives his belief in God to be responsible for his resistance and subsequent return to freedom. The vivid image of the mountains through the prison window gains meaning through their symbolic link with freedom and resistance in the Romanian culture:

'On the way to cell 101, in January 1951, through a window I saw the mountains which border my village. I prayed to God that I would one day look from my village to the prison rather than from the prison to my village. [...] After liberation I remembered seeing the Țibleș Mountains from the window of the prison and praying to God I would one day look the other way around. I got home in May. Around July I managed to go to the Țibleș Mountains. One evening I could see a dot of light on the horizon, and I knew it is the sun reflecting on the Gherla Prison walls. At that moment I prayed to God from the bottom of my heart. A prayer for myself and for those who were still behind bars.'

In one instance, Mr. Ilban makes sense of the topic by arguing for the educational role of knowing and facing up to the painful history under the Communist regime towards avoiding its repetition. His intense emotional involvement is visible through the imperative tone:

'They must know it! Otherwise, such things may happen again. Under no circumstance do I wish for the horrors committed by the Communist regime to happen again!'

Another theme Mr. Ilban brings into his meaning-making is that of justice in the context of the recent sentencing of former prison commander Alexandru Vișinescu to 20

years in prison for crimes against humanity. Considering his personal experiences in the Communist prisons, such a theme is presumed to trigger strong emotional reactions in Mr. Ilban. Such reactions are expressed through imperative calls for justice and labels such as ‘criminals’:

‘There is an absolute need for justice! Although late, those who are still alive must be trialed and known for what they were: criminals! They were all working hand in hand, so they cannot lie nowadays by saying they had no idea about the crimes being committed. These prison commanders and wardens were selected from the lower ranks of society, from those who did not like to work and who had no education and common sense.’

- **Portrait Number 10: Mr. Octav Bjoza**

Relevance to Study: President of the Association of the Former Political Detainees in Romania. Former political prisoner (1958-1962).

The leitmotif of Mr. Bjoza’s meaning-making on the investigated topic is represented by intimate memories of his own imprisonment during the Communist regime. A narrative where he connects his formative years to his subsequent arrest and present-day role as the president of the Association of the Former Political Detainees in Romania reveals an acknowledged and assumed ontological transformation. The fact that he openly admits his membership to an organization whose declared purpose was the violent removal of the Communist regime exposes a personality which places personal assumption of responsibility and freedom of expression at its core:

'I was born on 11th August 1938 in the Iași County, and I graduated from the >>Andrei Șaguna<< National College in Brașov. In 1957, I entered the Faculty of Geography and Geology at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași. At the end of my first year of university studies, I was expelled and arrested by the Securitate. Between 1956-1958 I had been part of the >>Guard of the Romanian Youth<< anti-Communist organization whose purpose was the >>violent removal of the popular democratic regime from our country<<. [...] Since 2009, I have been the president of the Association of the Former Political Detainees in Romania.'

Mr. Bjoza feels the need to thoroughly detail the first day of his imprisonment in the Gherla Prison. Memories of physical and mental abuse from the prison authorities, as well as sketches of difficult prison life, add meaning and dramatism to his narrative. He employs dark humor and irony to make sense of the topic, as seen in his references to the core of the Communist secret police being comprised of workers for the CFR – the Romanian Railways – of low education and status. The contrast of low-educated forces of repression arresting university students adds further dramatism to the story. Mr. Bjoza's emphasis on feeling stronger with every blow exposes a defiant and rebellious personality who would choose abuse over compromising his own values. For a declared Christian such as Mr. Bjoza, this episode is presumed to hold deeper meanings as it mirrors the Biblical episode of Christ carrying his own sacrificial cross to the place of His crucifixion in the insults of those who passed by:

'The date was 13th January 1959 when I entered the Gherla Prison at 1 am. We were brought from the train station in an open truck, forced to lie down on our stomach, one

on top of the other so that the residents would not see us. The Securitate was roaming the streets making sure no one can spot us. We reached the Gherla Prison. Between the first and second entry gates – a distance of about 40 meters – the guards had formed a corridor we had to go through. We were only allowed to look down to the tips of our boots, and our hands were tied at the back. Some only had a short-sleeve shirt. We had to move from one prison to the other only wearing the clothes we were arrested in. The commander of the prison – Petrace Goiciu – suddenly appears. He had been a pointsman in Galați, quickly turned into a Securitate colonel. The basis of the Securitate was represented by the CFR. And not everyone from CFR, but those in the lowest jobs! I am one of the few who passed through 14 headquarters of the Securitate, prisons and labor camps over four years. Goiciu told us: >>only those of you who are still standing when reaching the second gate can expect to get out of here alive<<. The guards were hitting us with clubs, metal door handles and other items. Out of about 30 people, only five or six of us were still standing when reaching the second gate. The more powerful the blows, the stronger and prouder I felt! In Gherla, I entered a huge room of about 160 prisoners. Normally the room could not have fitted more than 20.'

Mr. Bjoza also feels the need to connect his arrest to a spiritual transformation of self. He attributes this ontological change to the discussions with a cellmate whom he perceives as a godsend. An emphasis on a unifying ethnicity and belief among those who oppose Communism adds strength to his narrative. Additional strength and meaning stem from the symbolical contrast between a portrayed world without Communism – a realm of 'Good', 'Light', 'Beauty' and 'Infinity' – and a Communist society – a universe of 'Evil', 'Darkness', and 'Ugliness'. The repetition of 'victory' of the former over the latter

within the context of his imprisonment suggests the perceived victory of those who chose to suffer inside the Communist prisons for their values against their oppressors. For a declared Christian such as Mr. Bjoza, such a perception is presumed to hold deeper meanings as it mirrors the Resurrection of Christ after His Crucifixion which symbolizes the victory of Life over Death, Light over Darkness, and Good over Evil. This Biblical episode also symbolizes the salvation of mankind and adds metaphysical meaning to the narrative, considering Mr. Bjoza imperatively states that ‘This is the God that saved me!’. His references to ‘bars’ and ‘barbed wire’ add materiality and dramatism to the story, since both concepts are international symbols of repression:

‘A guy who had already been imprisoned for about ten years suddenly appears in front of me. He tells me: >>I see you are so young. Where do you come from? What were you convicted for? How many years were you sentenced to?<< I tell him that I have only done six months by now. He says that behind the bars and the barbed wire there is only one ethnicity. I am confused to see around me Romanians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans. >>Yes, my boy<<, he says, >>the only ethnicity here is that of Fighters against Communism!<< He takes a few more steps and says: >>And know one more thing! Here there is only one God!<< I look around, and I see members of all cults and sects. A few moments later he tells me again: >>God? Do you know what God is? God is the victory of Good over Evil, the victory of Light over Darkness, the victory of Beauty over Ugliness. Do not think about the beauty of the body, but the beauty of the soul. God is Nature itself, with her laws and phenomena. God is the big infinity, God is the small infinity. God is everywhere, my boy, God is in you. You will look for Him your entire life and will not be able to find Him. But my advice is never to stop searching for Him!<< How could I ever

forget this individual?! I cannot forget him! I am still his follower. This is the God that saved me!’

In the same line of an ontological transformation brought about by the interaction with the universe of Communist prisons, Mr. Bjoza speaks of a mental strengthening caused by the prison conditions. Vivid and detailed recollections of fear, hunger, sickness, and pain are linked to his perceived mental strengthening:

‘Upon my arrest, I was known in Braşov for my physical strength. But this was not enough for surviving. I was lucky that my mental strength was equal to my physical one. If hopelessness takes over you, there is no way to get out of this alive. This mental strength was shaped at home but refined and defined in the prisons. The prisoner I mentioned before also told me: >>My son, if you tell yourself hundreds of times every day that you are a winner, you are not afraid, you feel no pain, you feel no hunger, this will become reality! Your mental health is fundamental to your physical health.<< I do not get sick even nowadays. [...] I reached a point of not feeling pain anymore. I was focusing on the much more terrible pains other people were going through. Their fingernails were pulled out with pliers, their teeth were pulled out, their fingers were crushed in door frames, they were tied to wooden sticks and rotated like a pig on a spit while hit with clubs or beaten over the testicles with a school ruler until turning blue.’

Mr. Bjoza feels the need to tackle his perceived resistance in the prisons again by placing it in the context of the anti-Communist group he had been a member of at his arrest. His narrative connection between the resistance and the concepts of ‘God’ and ‘family’ is presumed to hold deep meanings for Mr. Bjoza. This is because Christianity

and Family are the two fundamental pillars of most Romanians' earthly and spiritual worlds, each of them with strong symbolic and archaic values and rituals attached. References to Love, Forgiveness, Compassion, and Freedom reinforce his deeply Christian meaning-making process, as these are the most important values promoted by the Christian belief. One means Mr. Bjoza employs for making sense of this aspect is humor and sarcasm, as seen in a remark about sending 'forerunners' – his colleagues in the anti-Communist movement who have meanwhile passed away – to keep a good place for him to the right hand of God. In Christian belief, it is said that the soul of a person who has lived a worthy life will be placed at the right hand of God upon his or her passage into the afterlife. This is symbolically believed to be the foremost place of honor and dignity. His playful comment on being placed at the right hand of God because he has never been a 'leftist' implies that those who opposed the Communist regime and have not given up their values and belief deserve to be welcomed to the Heavens:

'No doubt about it, what saved most of us was the belief in God and the image of the loved ones waiting for us to return home. Out of 15 youngsters arrested, only five of us are still alive. Out of these five, one is missing his right arm and his left leg, another one has a semi-paresis and serious memory and speech disorders, yet another one just had a heart attack four days ago. It seems I have good connections with God; I have sent my forerunners to keep a good place for me in the front row and to the right side of the Father, as I have never been a leftist. [...] And one more thing: love and forgiveness. Forgiving your oppressors give you great strength. I forgave mine while I was still in prison, this is the education I had received. Listen to everyone, even your opponents. If their ideas are

better, take them upon yourself. You will earn tremendously by not stubbornly following your initial stupid idea.'

Another way Mr. Bjoza attributes meaning to the connection between Orthodoxy and the Communist regime is by narrating instances of members of the clergy informing on their confessors to the Communist secret police. Mr. Bjoza's negative emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed in an imperative tone and through words such as 'ashamed'. In making sense of this topic, he also introduces another important theme of the interview – the persistence of individuals, values, and practices of the former Communist regime in the contemporary Romanian society:

'I am an Orthodox, and I am ashamed to have a patriarch who used to be a colonel for the Service of External Information! And metropolitans who used to inform people to the secret police! The clergy has a contract with God which does not involve any documents or signing but with an infinitely heavier weight than any other contract. In the archives, I came across situations when the Securitate gave the priest an audio recorder. When people confessed to the priest, he asked them if they supported the partisans and recorded their answers. Then the priest gave the recording to the Securitate, and the people got arrested for it.'

As mentioned, the theme of the continuation of elements of the former Communist regime in post-1989 Romania is a recurring theme in Mr. Bjoza's meaning-making process. His perceived nature of this continuation is revealed by the repetition of words such as 'heirs', 'criminals', and 'convicted us'. Such words – together with 'ashamed',

‘humiliated’ and ‘fight’ - reveal a strong emotional involvement in this aspect of the discussion:

‘Nowadays I am feeling ashamed of how humiliated we have been especially for the last five-six years by the heirs of the criminals who convicted us before and of those who knew about this and kept silent. [...] There is still a fight going on because those giving laws and ruling the country today are the heirs of the criminals who convicted us before.’

In different instances, he makes sense of the theme of persisting cogs of the Communist apparatus in the mechanism of post-1989 Romania by linking it to another major theme of his meaning-making: the personal assumption of responsibility for initiatives aimed at educating young generations of Romanians about the history of the Communist regime. He makes sense of this aspect by openly accusing the corrupted and censoring nature of former cadres of the Communist secret police and their heirs who are in important governmental or educational positions at present. The fact that he is naming some of these people reveals a personality which places Truth and Freedom at its core. For a declared believer like Mr. Bjoza, such an approach is presumed to hold deeper meanings considering Truth and Freedom are fundamental values promoted by Christianity. This is expressed in emotion-charged words such as ‘criminals’, ‘robbing this nation’, ‘misery’, ‘filthy rich’, ‘suffering’, and ‘stupid people’, and in a series of imperative remarks and rhetorical questions. His repetition of ‘integrity’ reveals his focus on the need for the moral regeneration of the Romanian society through personal initiatives of educating young generations with the knowledge and values of the former political prisoners:

'Under no circumstance should these memories be overlooked or forgotten! The young people should know what to defend against! There are purposeful attempts to hide the recent history of Romania! [...] The youth should know this history because many of those preaching to them about democracy and giving life lessons are the criminals from the Communist regime, whose real contemporary concern is robbing this nation. They have taken Romania to the worst possible misery, while a bunch got filthy rich! This is because those judicial institutions paid from public money have not taken their duties to completion. As an example, two-three years ago the management of the Superior Council of Magistracy was given to Adrian Bordea, the son of the Securitate general and the chief of the Section I of the Securitate, Aron Bordea. In 1985, he was the one in charge of a colleague of mine who had been imprisoned for 14 years. Another example is the son of a Securitate colonel – now the Dean of the Faculty of Law in Bucharest – who was named an honorary citizen in Braşov. So, these people are teaching law and legislation! It is not easy for us! Our suffering did not stop at liberation; they have been chasing us throughout our lives! My greatest suffering was not in prison, it was being ruled by stupid people after liberation! [...] We must pay attention! I keep asking myself the following question: why is it only their children who get access to important public positions?! You do not see any heirs of the former political prisoners in the Parliament or the Government. How come no one is asking this important question?!' [...] Someone once told me: >>This country has never had a shortage of bright minds but has always lacked people of great integrity<<. I think I know fewer people of true character and integrity than the number of fingers I have on one hand.'

Continuing the theme of private assumption of responsibility for amending societal flaws, Mr. Bjoza tackles it in the context of politics. He makes sense of this aspect in the form of self-criticism for joining a political movement at the persuasion of a former political prisoner. His negative perception of the political phenomenon is bluntly expressed in words such as ‘slut’, ‘abominations’, and ‘shameless’:

‘I did politics once because I was a coward. It happened when I met someone I could not say no to: Corneliu Coposu. [...] I had stayed away from politics because to be good in politics you must be a slut. At that moment I was weak, I could not say no to him. [...] When I saw all the abominations, I could not believe how shameless politicians can be.’

Another way he attributes meaning to the narrative is by recalling issues he has faced because of his role as the president of the Association of the Former Political Detainees in Romania, and because of his participation in projects aimed at creating awareness about the victims of the Communist regime. He makes sense of this aspect by contrasting life-threatening situations to his perceived strength which he attributes to his Truth and Freedom-driven personality, as discussed before:

‘For 1.5 years I have been receiving death threats, so I had to change my phone number. I inquired with the police. It seems the calls and messages came from an untraceable sim card. Things like >>we will split your head open<<, >>we will burn your house down<<, >>we have hired private assassins to kill you<<. The police asked for my permission to tap my phones. I told them that my phones have already been tapped without my permission. This is another reason why I feel strong: I have never hidden anything, I

have never had any secrets toward anyone! What I am telling you now, I have also said in public TV shows, and my message has always been relentless.'

In the same line, he continues making sense of the persistence of Communist elements in modern-day Romania by linking this theme to another one: justice. Mr. Bjoza does this by placing it in the context of the recent sentencing of former prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. His emotional perception of this theme is expressed through the repetition of 'too late', and the reiteration of the idea that many of those who had been cadres of the Communist secret police have illegally obtained wealth post-1989 by commercializing formerly national resources:

'Too late, too late! The judicial system shook hands with the criminals, and together they robbed this nation!'

When referring precisely at the Sighet Memorial Museum, Mr. Bjoza praises its existence and confirms his close connection to the institution and its developers. His positive perception of the site is expressed in words such as 'extraordinary' and 'exceptional', while the analogy between the Sighet Memorial and a 'sacred temple' or 'sanctuary' adds a metaphysical aspect to his affection with the place. Mr. Bjoza's attribution of meaning to the Sighet Museum comes as a synthesis of Mr. Bjoza's sense-making on the investigated topic. In so doing, he reiterates the main themes previously discussed: the need for personal assumption of responsibility for memorial-educational projects aimed at popularizing the dark history of the Communist regime, the importance for young generations of Romanians to become aware of this side of history, and the

initiatives of certain interest-groups for censoring and discrediting historical attempts focused on the former political prisoners and the anti-Communist resistance. His reference to a need to replicate certain curse words he had been subjected to while in prison exposes the influence of the memories of imprisonment on his subsequent meaning-making process:

'The Sighet Memorial is an extraordinary place, and I am very close to it! Even among very valuable people to us, there are animosities. I do not accept or take them into consideration. I need all these people in my life! Some criticize Lucia Hossu-Longin for having been a member of the Communist Party. I tell them: do you have any idea what this lady has done for us?! Do you have any idea how many death threats she has received for making the names of these criminals public right after the events in 1989?! The same criticism is usually brought to Ana Blandiana. In these situations, their past does not matter. We must take the good things from each individual. These people have been by our sides after the fall of the regime. What Blandiana and Longin did will last forever. Some young people are still privileged to have met us while we are still alive. It is one thing to read history from books and another thing to learn history from those who made it. I go to the Sighet Memorial just like going to a sacred temple, to a sanctuary. I am scared that, at some point, certain groups will put pressure for removing most of the items in this museum. I will never accept for the anti-Communist resistance to be broken apart on political, ethnic, or religious criteria. Never! It must remain a complete whole! I feel like saying some bad words. See how the subconscious works?! Sometimes when I get really angry with this injustice, I have the need to use the same curses and bad words which were addressed to me while I was locked up. I consider my relationship with

Blandiana, Rusan, Ioana Boca to be exceptional. What they have done for us cannot be overlooked. An extraordinary effort, not so much for us as for the upcoming generations.'

In the same line of memorial initiatives, Mr. Bjoza feels the need to make sense of the recent societal discussions for the need of a museum dedicated to the history of the Communist regime in the capital city. While expressing his strong support for such a project, he imperatively calls for this new museum to focus on the 'crimes' of the Communist regime. His repetition of the word reveals his strong emotional involvement in the topic, presumably linked to his own memories of imprisonment:

'For sure it is needed! Not a Museum of Communism, but a Museum of the Communist Crimes! I emphasize the word >>crimes<<!'

- **Portrait Number 11: Mr. Radu Preda**

Relevance to Study: Executive President of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER).

After being introduced to the general topic of investigation, Mr. Preda begins his meaning-making process with intimate memories of growing up under the Communist regime. Hints to limited electricity, heating, warm water, and to a scarcity of food add dramatic meanings to his narrative as they mirror the living conditions of most Romanians especially throughout the 1980s. Instances of secretly reading works of philosophy, and of pressures to join the Union of the Communist Youth and to read the official newspaper

of the regime enhance the portrait of growing up in those times. Extra dramatism comes from the contrast between Mr. Preda depicted lived reality and his dreams of seeing the world and having free access to different types of arts and information. The perceived nature of his educators is revealed through the label 'filthy politruks', characterized as 'culturally limited' and 'aggressive'. Originating in the Russian language where it refers to a political instructor in the Soviet army, the word 'politruk' has become a derogatory term colloquially used to describe those individuals whose main purpose is to spread the Party line of thinking and action in their field of work. The peak of narrative dramatism and emotional involvement is presumed to be reached when he remembers his grandfather being forced - at gunpoint - to donate all his possessions to the state:

'I remember growing up under the Communist regime and secretly reading the books of Cioran and Eliade. Back then, I was dreaming of having access to libraries, bookstores, art galleries, the great cathedrals. See them with my own eyes, not on film! But all I could hope to have was heating in the winter, electricity, warm water, and food. I refused until the last minute to join the Union of the Communist Youth, and I systematically refused to subscribe to the >>Scînteia<< newspaper. [...] The teachers I encountered on this political line were nothing but filthy politruks. They were as culturally limited as they were aggressive. [...] My family had to move from one city to another and start anew after my grandfather was forced to sign that he donates all his properties to the state. He had no political affiliation, but he was wealthy. Some of those he used to hire for temporary jobs took him to the forest one day, put a gun at his head and asked him to choose: >>Donate everything, or we shoot you!<< Later, my mother was expelled from the Faculty of Law because she had >>unhealthy origins<<.'

Having detailed personal and familial memories of repression under the Communist regime, Mr. Preda continues in the same line by narrating the cases of other influential people in his life who were persecuted by the Communist authorities. The names of prominent members of the intellectual and spiritual Romanian elite imprisoned by the Communists and later influencing his personality – such as Paul Păltănea⁴⁶, Petre Țuțea⁴⁷, and Bartolomeu Anania⁴⁸ - add identitarian dramatism and meaning to the narrative. The fact that Mr. Preda connects memories of personal and familial hardships and the repression of his mentors under the Communist regime to his subsequent research and work in the field of investigating Communist crimes reveals an acknowledged and assumed ontological transformation brought to his life by the interaction with the realm of political persecution. This is expressed in statements such as ‘formative process’, ‘all those who mattered in my life’, and ‘people who clearly influenced my life’. Considering his formation as a theologian and his profoundly Christian meaning-making, references to ‘we are not the sole constructors of our lives’ and ‘events I could have never organized and premeditated’ critically exposes a perceived divine involvement in this process of ontological transformation:

‘I have been working for the IICCMER for two years. I could not have imagined I would work here. This is a clear example that we are not the sole constructors of our lives, maybe except for bad decisions. We cannot delegate bad decisions; they belong solely to

⁴⁶ Paul Păltănea – Romanian historian and professor. Imprisoned for 10 years in different Communist prisons.

⁴⁷ Petre Țuțea – Romanian philosopher. Imprisoned for 13 years in different Communist prisons.

⁴⁸ Bartolomeu Anania – Romanian Orthodox bishop and writer. Imprisoned for 6 years in different Communist prisons.

us. But the sum of what we can call >>good<< decisions is linked to events I could have never organized or premeditated. So, I owe my presence here to a formative process marked by meetings I had with people who had been political prisoners under Communism. Practically, almost all those who mattered in my life from high-school onwards lived through this. My history teacher, Mihai Cojocaru, had been deported. The professor and academician Paul Păltănea was imprisoned by the Communists. So was Father Igor Jechiu, an eminent priest and extraordinary bibliophile in whose house I even saw an incunabulum which people can usually see in a museum. Continuing with my experience close to Țuțea. And, of course, my 20-year apprenticeship under Father Bartolomeu Anania. These are all people who clearly influenced my life. To the left and right of this line set by them, I met male and female former political prisoners. Just a few days ago I met Galina Răduleanu. These are people and destinies who increased my sensitivity towards this topic. [...] I am a theologian, and I teach a discipline which borders theology and social sciences. This absolutely involves a high degree of empathy and compassion. [...] One cannot engage in social theology in today's Romania and Eastern Europe and ignore both the historical and long-term effects of totalitarianism. Even if one is not interested in Communism, it is impossible for him or her not to ponder over Communism when seeing its mid or long-term effects. You also experience these effects, consciously or not, if you live in a post-totalitarian society like ours.'

Mr. Preda feels the need to reiterate this perceived ontological transformation brought about by the interaction with the universe of Communist detention in his young formative years. This is expressed through the repetition of 'grow up'. The reference to the 'Memorialul Durerii' ('The Memorial of Suffering') series produced by Lucia Hossu-

Longin adds dramatism and identitarian meanings to the narrative, considering this project was the first on the national TV station to openly and thoroughly speak about the crimes of the Communist regime after the 1989 Revolution. Adding further strength to the meaning-making is the symbolical contrast between the depiction of political prisoners as ‘giants’ who can help a youngster grow up and the portrayal of the Communist regime as a ‘colossus with clay legs’ because of its sustained fear of being overturned. In this context, Mr. Preda feels the need to reiterate his perception of the strongest achievement of Communism being its long-lasting effects on the collective Romanian mentality. This perception of these effects’ amplitude is expressed in words such as ‘perpetual’, ‘prolonged’, and ‘penetration’:

‘My relationship with the former political prisoners is like a therapy. Especially meeting them in my young formative years. In fact, this is the purpose of valuable people and essential books. They help you grow up. You climb on the back of the giants! [...] I grew up with the political prisoners. I read and watched their stories repeatedly, for example, the >>Memorialul Durerii<< series. It is complicated to express such feelings into words! Beyond empathy and the wave of revolt caused by the cruelty and gratuity of these crimes, what surprised me the most in all testimonials was the discrepancy between the means of the regime and the weakness and inefficiency of the people who comprised the regime. A regime afraid of a young person who writes poems, or of a clergyman holding masses is like a colossus who fears mice. Communism is a colossus with clay legs! This entire penitentiary system emphasizes how weak and fragile this politico-ideological construct of force is. Which does not mean there is not a strong force behind this regime. The regime fell in symbol and fact but is perpetual in mentality. And this is where its true

force lies! Post-Communism is the real proof of force for Communism. As paradoxical as this may be. It is prolonged in intensity and diversity with a penetration I could not have forecasted. I thought that, at the fall of Communism, we would look towards other social, cultural, and political horizons. But this never came true.'

When referring precisely to the Sighet Memorial Museum, Mr. Preda praises its existence on several occasions but also expresses his perception of an outdated and aged museal interpretation. Another aspect he feels the need to emphasize is the difficulty of displaying a balanced and all-encompassing historical interpretation in a place such as the Sighet Memorial. He tackles this aspect by exemplifying different categories of victims which may be depicted in museums focused on the Communist repression. The reference to 'two million victims just in Romania' adds scale and dramatism to his narrative. Another means employed by Mr. Preda to make sense of the investigated topic are dark humor and sarcasm, as seen in his remark about the Americans arriving 'half a century late':

'Sighet is an essential place in its own existence. It is the most long-standing memorial site in Romania and maybe in this part of the world. From this perspective, its developers deserve to be honored. [...] I say it again, I have only respect for what they did there. But, 20-something years after its inauguration, even a successful project such as Sighet needs to be rejuvenated and updated. [...] The hermeneutic stake at Sighet is a large one. Each side wants to see their own version of history on display in a museum. [...] A regime which lasted for so many decades created victims not only in the penitentiary system per se, but also in the environment outside the prisons. It is enough to mention deformed

people, people whose dreams were broken, those who had to flee the country. The idea of victimhood must be very thoroughly divided into typologies to realize there are more than two million victims just in Romania. We also must remember Communism has not only created victims, but also anti-Communist fighters who did not consider themselves victims. Those who chose the armed fight in the mountains were fully aware that death awaits them unless the Americans arrive. And we all know the Americans arrived half a century late. There are many shades!’

Although praising its pioneering existence, Mr. Preda provides a thorough critical perspective on the interpretation on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum. More precisely, he disapproves of the interpretive mix of memorial and museum. His focus is on the renovation works which have diluted the strength and message of the original prison building, as expressed through the repetition of words such as ‘*in situ*’, ‘genuine’, ‘originality’, or ‘the place events took place in’. He makes sense of this aspect by comparing the Sighet Memorial Museum with similar initiatives, such as: the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington where they managed to harmoniously mix the memorial and museal aspects; the Jilava Prison initiative where they completely separated the two aspects and kept the former prison in its genuine state; and the Church of the Holy Grave in Israel where they separated the two aspect, but each interest-group developed their own museum in the proximity of the genuine site. The examples provided to back up his criticism of the interpretation at the Sighet Memorial Museum expose a meaning-making where theology and historiography complement each other:

‘Through the filter of the last quarter of a century, we can say Sighet is not a model to be followed, as the two aspects – memorial and museum – should be distinct. Mixing them up is a serious issue. The two are not exclusive of each other but should be distinct. When the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington was developed, it was built from scratch. So, the memorial project is different from the place events took place in. The in situ memorial places have a quasi-cult dimension, for example, a memorial hall with a semi-sacred meaning. It is a typically American civic religion. So, in such a place, the mix of museum and memorial is justified. But in places such as Sighet, the two aspects should be distinct, which does not mean they cannot complete each other. For example, one idea which circulates nowadays about the development of the Jilava Prison into a memorial is that a completely new building should be built in its proximity to contain events, meetings, a library, and so on. But the prison should be left as it is because this is the true force of in situ genuine places. It is what we, the Christians, have as a bad example at the Church of the Holy Grave, where each confession wanted to build their own museum around the memorial site. The genuine place is the one which sends a message, a message which can later be deepened, diversified, decrypted in a complementary place which does not affect its originality.’

Mr. Preda continues making sense of the Sighet Memorial Museum by placing it in the context of recent initiatives for developing similar institutions in other parts of the country. He is critical towards those who argue no other such initiatives are needed because Sighet already exists. His intense emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed in a series of imperative remarks:

'My second observation is an almost pathological argument which I have been receiving for the last several years whenever I called for a Communism-related museum in Bucharest: we already have such a museum in Sighet! The existence of the Sighet Museum seems to inhibit any similar initiatives elsewhere in Romania. This is revolting! They inhibit other initiatives because one item already exists!'

As Mr. Preda's meaning-making process unfolds, Communist-focused museography reveals itself as a major narrative theme. From his position as the Executive President of the IICCMER, he feels the need to detail his perception on the Institute's recent initiative for developing a museum focused on the history of the Communist regime in the capital city. The frequent repetition of 'Communist crimes' reveals the importance he places on this aspect being the core of such museographic and educational initiatives. Words such as 'concrete', 'documented', 'physical existence', 'evidence', and 'scientific credibility' add tangibility and weight to his argument. The contrast between these calls for objectivity and subjective statements such as 'It was a mass killing machine!' infuse his sense-making with further meaning and dramatism. His strong emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed through absolutist remarks such as 'impossible to deny' and 'cannot be denied under any circumstance', and also through the imperative narrative tone:

'I believe a certain consensus can be reached for a museum of Communist crimes, as they are concrete, documented, and impossible to deny in their physical existence! This is what we are doing at the institute: we gather evidence with the purpose of not being accused we condemn an ideology in the name of another ideology. Based on this, we have the

scientific credibility to propose a museum of Communist crimes. In time, as generations relax on this topic – in the sense of getting rid of direct interests and tensions – we can start answering questions of how such crimes were politically and culturally possible. Later, in 100 years, we can start a process of interpreting how Communism survived in Russia, China, and so on. So, these are the three layers of my perception. The core should be the Communist crimes because they cannot be denied under any circumstance! It was a mass killing machine! Then expanding the historiographical narrative through developing a network of memorial sites aimed at translating the big history through small ones. Finally, reaching the outer circle which includes the genesis and development of Communism. But everything should have a starting point, so I plead for a Museum of Communist Crimes.'

Another way Mr. Preda attributes meaning to the theme of Communism-focused museography is by linking it to another major theme of his sense-making process: the personal assumption of responsibility. He tackles this theme from different perspectives. The alternation of 'I' and 'we' is a call for both individual and collective assumption of responsibility. On a personal level, he feels the need to emphasize his assumed responsibility for liberalizing the institutional speech and initiatives on the memorialization of the victims of the Communist regime. On an institutional level, Mr. Preda speaks of assumed responsibility for thoroughly and seriously take this memorial initiative to completion. On a collective national level, he proposes the identitarian moral importance of assuming active responsibility for facing the sensitive, painful, and uncomfortable aspects of the national history, rather than assuming the passive role of victims:

'We have been talking about this daily in the IICCMER. We had workshops, we went to the US and Europe to meet specialists, we treat this topic seriously. If I accomplished something during my time as director is discussing this more thoroughly than ever before. It is not only my merit, but the times are riper. There is a certain historical inertia. After a nation has lived through an experience of the dimension and intensity of the Communist dictatorship in Romania, we can distinguish two clear segments of the Communist dictatorship. Based on the first one – the Soviet military occupation – we can assume the role of victims. But the second and longest one is based on our own scenario. The pain caused by the detachment from the past is double because it also involves ourselves. We do not have the luxury of affirming the entire Communist regime was one of Soviet occupation, thus decriminalizing ourselves for our collaborationism – which we had plenty of - with the Communist authorities. Such an approach is profoundly dishonest and raises fundamental questions of morals about individual and collective history.'

Mr. Preda continues his meaning-making process on the theme of Communism-focused museography by placing it in the context of contemporary attempts to censor and distort the history of Communist repression. He metaphorically labels such efforts as 'an undeclared indecent war on memory and victims'. Mr. Preda makes sense of this aspect by linking it to a variety of interest-groups whose pressures have slowed down the process of developing a new museographic institution in the capital city. His call for the victims of Communism to be given the same memorial and commemorative importance as those of the Nazis adds strength and dramatism to the narrative. Further dramatism is obtained through a sequence of words which illustrate Mr. Preda's perception of the effects of the Communist regime over the Romanian society: 'killing', 'poisoning', 'disfiguring',

‘falsifying’, and ‘terrorist’. His focus on the need for a moral regeneration of the society is expressed through a criticism of a recent wave of opinion according to which the crimes of the Communist regime can be counterbalanced by the relative infrastructural development of the country. For a theologian such as Mr. Preda, such stories of perceived physical and moral abuse are believed to hold deep meanings and trigger strong emotional reactions considering Christianity mainly promotes values of love, compassion, and morality among people. One other way of attributing meaning to the aspect of censorship and distortion of history is by connecting such practices to another major theme of Mr. Preda’s meaning-making process: the persistence of elements of the Communist regime in the post-1989 Romanian society. He expresses his strong belief in this through a sequence of unsubtle remarks such as ‘are still in the system’, ‘heirs live good lives’, ‘genealogical and ideological continuity’, and ‘is still active today’. Placing these aspects in the context of the 2018 centennial anniversary of the reunification of Romania adds identitarian meanings to the narrative. Extra dramatism is achieved through a sarcastic remark rooted in dark humor about the territory of present-day nation of Moldova not being part of the celebrated Great Romania. Another way of attributing meaning to the aspect of historical censorship is by bringing back the theme of personal assumption of responsibility for becoming involved in projects aimed at countering such censoring initiatives:

‘In 2018 we will celebrate 100 years since the reunification of Great Romania - a Great Romania still not as great as it was 100 years ago. Out of these 100 years, almost three quarters are not depicted in museums. They are not filtered through museal speech. Because a consensus has not been agreed on, because people are ambivalent, because of

the ideological interests kicking and tossing each other, because the far left will never admit it is as noxious as the far right. To this, we add an undeclared indecent war on memory and victims, and the perception of the Holocaust as being more important than the Gulag which to me is an injurious statement towards both groups of victims. There is also a form of censorship through omission since we are still not granted free access to all archives. [...] As we speak, we find ourselves in a moment of memorial and identitarian inflexibility. This country is messed up! [...] Plus, dialectics such as >>Communism killed us in beatings, but they also gave us apartments, water, and elevators<<. I am asking many: was it worth getting water, elevators, and public illumination if this meant killing the nation's elite, poisoning its language, disfiguring its history, falsifying its esthetic, literary, and value canon?! If so, then we have a big problem! That is why the title of my book is >>Communism. A failed modernity<<. [...] Instead of following my theological path, I got involved in the work at the IICCMER. This meant assuming certain risks based on the ideological conflict and not only, plus the struggle for resources. [...] We will never be able to design a museum whose narrative can please everyone! At least if we consider many of those who were the foundation of the system before 1989 are still in the system, while their heirs live good lives in important state roles. There is a genealogical and ideological continuity of those who brought Communism to Romania in its terrorist form. Just like most of Ceaușescu's Party and state structure is still active today.'

Under the same umbrella of purposeful attempts for censoring and distorting the history of Communist repression, Mr. Preda feels the need to detail the presence of such practices in the official educational curriculum. The perception of these censoring

practices is expressed through remarks such as ‘still a gross manipulation’, ‘a very soft version is presented’, and ‘still witnessing a strong ideological battle’, and also through repeated imperative calls for the ‘crimes’ of the Communist regime to be popularized at different educational levels. His strong belief in the educative role of knowing the Communist crimes is voiced in words such as ‘hardcore’, ‘drill’, and ‘bite’. In making sense of this aspect, Mr Preda reiterates and intermingles previously discussed themes, such as the continuation of individuals and practices from the Communist regime into the contemporary Romanian society, the belief in the moral regeneration of the nation through the facing and acceptance of sensitive aspects of the national history, and the personal assumption of responsibility for initiatives aimed at supporting the aforementioned moral regeneration. His strong emotional involvement is expressed through a series of imperative remarks and vivid language such as ‘kissed the regime’s ass’:

‘In school history books there is still a gross manipulation! The fact that students in Germany learn more about the Communist crimes than they do in Romania raises important questions. [...] At the university level, even when they teach the history of Communism, a very soft version is presented. No crimes! We should be neither naïve nor paranoid. It is clear we are still witnessing a strong ideological battle which we believed to be finished or at least helpless against the evidence. [...] Those who kissed the regime’s ass before 1989 cannot greet democracy with flowers. These are poisonous flowers! Most of our important present-day intellectuals have been praising the regime before 1989. [...] It is important to acknowledge we can never know everything, but it is as important to realize we must start somewhere. So, I repeat: we must develop this museum of

Communist crimes as a hard core, as the tip of a drill which, in time, will bite more and more from the social conscience!'

The transformational role of memorial projects becomes a major theme of Mr. Preda's attribution of meaning to the investigated topic. This theme is made sense of through a mix of historical and religious arguments, which – considering his formation as a theologian and work in the field of history – reconfirms the ontological transformation brought to Mr. Preda's life by the interaction with the realm of Communist political repression at early stages of his life. More precisely, he employs theological analogies to make sense of long-lasting debates on the appropriate use of sensitive national history. To a world of 'horrors', 'sins', 'explosions of hatred', 'negative memories', 'trauma', and 'schism' he symbolically contrasts a realm of reconciliation, balance, compassion, and societal and moral regeneration brought by a sustained approach towards accepting and taking responsibility for the sensitive, uncomfortable and painful aspects of the national history. To make further sense of this aspect, he brings back into the discussion the idea of interest-groups purposefully attempting to spread a general societal wave of thinking according to which Romanians should focus less on the past and look towards the future. This is what Mr. Preda labels as 'interested amnesia'. Adding scale and strength to his narrative is a reiterated call for the crimes of Communist and Nazi regimes to be given the same memorial and commemorative importance:

'This discussion on the utilization of memory is dated 403 B.C. The Athenians debated this regarding their civil war in 404 B.C. They wondered how their democracy should relate to the horrors of the war considering they had killed each other. [...] This debate

has been tormenting and dividing consciences, and this is where the theological perspective comes into play. Christianity is unique not just through the law of love, but also through the law of memory. So, what the Athenians were fiercely debating about should be clear to a Christian from day one: that memory has a therapeutic, preventive, and constructive role. It is clearly therapeutic because, when you remember your sins, you have the possibility to heal. It can bring reconciliation between you and others. It can prevent future explosions of hatred. It can also be a constructive element, as the sum of negative memories can help us build a better future. After trauma, after schism, after your own sins, you re-enter your spiritual life strengthened and wiser. So, for Christian theology, memory is not a possibility, it is not voluntary. The church life is profoundly memorial! [...] This memorial function stops when we reach our recent past. In my opinion, this is a big problem! Only insidiously may one wonder whether remembering the crimes of the Communist past is a good or bad thing. Those who plead for not looking to the past either practice interested amnesia or are unconscious. They are guilty in both cases! In our European context, the memory of Auschwitz and the Gulag is an ethical duty just like any other.'

Another important theme of Mr. Preda's meaning-making process is justice which he brings in the discussion at different moments throughout the interview. One way of attributing meaning to this theme is through a mixture of historical and biblical analogies aimed at explaining his perceived connection between divine and worldly justice. For a theologian such as Mr. Preda, the mentioning of the worldly judicial biblical act which freed a thief and sentenced Christ to death by crucifixion is presumed to hold strong symbolical meanings. He also feels the need to draw attention to the dangers of

symbolically condemning a regime by only executing its leaders. Mr. Preda attributes meaning to this aspect by allegorically comparing the execution of the Romanian dictatorial couple in December 1989 to an act of voodoo magic meant to inflict a change but, in fact, maintaining a status quo:

'Divine justice does not block worldly justice. In both the New and Old Testament, we have instances of worldly justice. Some are clear acts of injustice, such as the liberation of a bandit – Barabbas, and the strictly ideological and interested condemnation of an innocent - Christ. So, I repeat, the divine justice does not limit the worldly justice. But, as mentioned, the symbolical killing of the regime through the execution of the scapegoats – the dictatorial couple - enters the archetypal concentration of evil in a voodoo-like manner: evil is symbolically killed by pinning the hearts of the Nicolae and Elena voodoo dolls. Through this gesture, the entire community remains in the already established patterns and finds comfort in the hope that everything will be fine. But everything is not fine.'

Mr. Preda also makes sense of the theme of justice by placing it in the context of the recent condemnation of the former Communist penitentiary commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. He warns against the over-conceptualization and over-generalization of historical crimes which lead to a lack of responsibility for repressive acts. Giving palpability to his claim is an imperative call to 'give a face to this era and this evil' by investigating the crimes of the Communist regime and sentencing the culprits. Mr. Preda speaks of a process of individual and collective atonement, healing and regeneration brought by the personal assumption of responsibility

for committing abusive acts, and by the institutional and societal assumption of responsibility for judicial acts which sanction such acts no matter of the age of the perpetrators or the time passed since they were committed. Another way he attributes meaning to this aspect is by reiterating the importance of condemning both individual offenders and the ideology in whose name they repressed others. He makes sense of this aspect by labeling what he perceives to be a symbolic sentencing of scapegoats as a 'sinister farce'. For a theologian like Mr. Preda, such a detailed focused on the theme of justice is presumed to hold deep meanings considering Justice is a fundamental pillar of Christianity according to which one's soul will be allowed passage into the Heavens based on a judgment of his or her worldly deeds. His emotional involvement is expressed through imperative remarks, rhetorical questions, and words such as 'beastly':

'In its intensity and longevity, historical evil is on the verge of becoming a natural phenomenon. When a historical event becomes a cataclysm, it exonerates itself. No one has a direct or indirect responsibility anymore. We say: this is history, it came over us, some died, some rose from the dust, some did or did not have a career, this is it...bad luck! It enters the total zone of anomie, of lack of law. But it is imperative to give a face to this era and this evil which happened here for 45 years in symmetry with the voodoo practice of 1989. Even if his name is Vişinescu, and even if he is 90 years old. By the way, someone asked me once how come we have post-mortem heroes, and we do not have post-mortem criminals. From this perspective, justice is ageless! I see no reason against trialng the last ministers of Ceauşescu. So those saying it is too late for justice commit a crime when deterring the divine and creative justice, and when forgetting that man's capacity to convert, to admit one's mistake exists within until the end of life. We can never

be sure that one, at least in their last moments, will regret his or her deeds. Even if he may have certain explanations. For example, Vişinescu said he did not act alone as a prison commander. Where are those from the judicial system?! Where are those from the Direction of Penitentiaries?! But he did act alone when, because of his beastly instinct and in full awareness of his actions, he was beating up Mihalache and other prisoners. It is these beastly actions he was trialed for rather than for being part of a system. Although the system should have also been trialed alongside Vişinescu. As I said before, if we believe Vişinescu's trial is actually the trial of Communism it means we are living through a sinister farce!'

Mr. Preda brings back in the discussion the theme of justice when he openly accuses the previous executive president of the IICCMER, Andrei Muraru, of starting a public judicial campaign against 35 former cadres of the Communist repressive apparatus only for obtaining political benefits. Such an attitude reveals an outspoken personality which places freedom of expression at its core. Considering his formation as a theologian, this focus is assumed to hold strong meanings for Mr. Preda since Freedom is both a fundamental driving force and an ultimate life goal for Christian believers:

'I do not agree with the way these so-called >>torturers<< were selected. Why 35? Why not 45 or 445? It was a press campaign of the former director of the institute, rather than support offered to the judicial system.'

Having already thoroughly expressed different transformations brought on personal and collective levels by the 1989 Revolution, Mr. Preda feels the need to bluntly reconfirm these changes. To make sense of this aspect, he brings back the theme of the

persistence of Communist element in the contemporary Romanian society which he labels as the ‘toxic continuity of dictatorship into the democratic process’. The contrast between this reinforced theme and his perception of the ‘incomparable’ and ‘enormous’ change brought by the 1989 Revolution adds dramatism and meaning to his meaning-making process:

‘The times before and after the 1989 Revolution are incomparable! Those claiming nothing or too little has been achieved ever since are right. But this is the good news after all: despite this toxic continuity of dictatorship into the democratic process, Romania has made enormous steps! Not admitting this only legitimizes those who wanted to keep Romania imprisoned.’

- **Portrait Number 12: Mr. Alin Mureșan**

Relevance to Study: Founding President of the Centre for Studies in Contemporary History (CSCH). General Director of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile.

One thematic leitmotif arising throughout the interview is that of the transformational role the interactions with former political prisoners and their stories had over Mr. Mureșan’s life and personality. The fact that he connects his birth details to his studies during which he met political prisoners and to his subsequent work and research

in contemporary history reveals a meaning-making process which acknowledges the ontological transformation brought about by the contact with former political detainees:

'I was born in Oradea, 30th April 1983. I graduated in Journalism in Cluj. Although I have not practiced Journalism, it helped me in my current profession to some extent. It introduced me to the profound study of history through one professor who invited former political prisoners to class. This is how my interaction with political prisoners started. In time it got deeper, but this was the foundation for what I am still doing nowadays. [...] I did a postgraduate course in Contemporary History. I have been working for the IICCMER since 2007. I launched an NGO in 2012.'

At a different point of the interview, he brings back and details the professional transformational sub-theme. In so doing, he feels the need to mention he had come in contact with memorial works of detention from a young age. The fact that he connects memories of his young formative years to his present-day work and research reconfirms an actively assumed ontological transformation caused by the interaction with the realm of former political prisoners. While making sense of this aspect, he also introduces another major theme of his meaning-making process: the personal assumption of responsibility for popularizing the history of Communist detention. Mr. Mureșan expresses his views with the help of exclamatory remarks and irony, while his reference to feeling a 'calling' adds a metaphysical aspect to his attribution of meaning:

'I had some basic knowledge on this topic from mainstream autobiographical works on detention I had read in secondary school and in high-school. I purposefully and thoroughly started researching it during my undergraduate years when Ruxandra

Cesereanu invited three former political prisoners to speak to us in class. They impressed me greatly! I felt the need to remain in permanent contact with one of them to write a book. I thought this man's life story must be published. Since no one hurried to do this, for some reason, I felt a calling. [...] My final undergraduate project was on the Pitești Phenomenon. I knew this is what I want to focus on rather than journalism since I took this class and interacted with the political prisoners. This study was published. When I came to Bucharest, I was invited to join the IICCMER or CNSAS. This is it!'

Another transformational sub-theme mentioned by Mr. Mureșan at different points of the interview is that of a perceived intellectual growth which he associates to the impressively knowledgeable profiles of former political prisoners and to the importance of his job at the IICCMER. His reference to playing at Champion League level reconfirms that humor and irony are means he employs to make sense of the investigated topic:

'In order to prepare for this [interviewing a former political prisoner], I spent my summer holidays in the library in Cluj reading everything I could find on life in the Communist prisons of Romania, to understand the context. This man was an intellectual authority; he had graduated from two universities, the top of his class at the Faculty of Law in Cluj in the interwar years when school in Romania was top level. He had a PhD in Economic Sciences and was fluent in seven languages. I was a no-name student, so I had to prepare thoroughly. [...] From the beginning I felt disadvantaged with not having a degree in History. So, in this first years with the IICCMER, I read extensively on the topic. I was playing at Champions League level, not in the second division.'

The ontological transformation achieved from the interaction with the former political prisoners is openly acknowledged and assumed by Mr. Mureșan in instances when he thoroughly details the spiritual side of this change. This is clearly visible through the frequent repetition of ‘God’, ‘Church’ and ‘Christianity’. He makes sense of this aspect by contrasting his portrait before meeting the detainees – unpatriotic, atheist, vengeful – to a dramatically changed self after the encounters with the universe of political imprisonment. Another means of attributing meaning to his narrative is by linking his metaphysical change to the Communists’ torturous attempts to extinguish the Christian belief and values from the Romanian society:

‘I changed greatly from an ontological perspective. Without looking for it, I found the purpose and meaning of my life. Without looking for it and without being too open toward this. Being able to see and feel these people and hear their fabulous life stories, I had role models in front of me. I needed no one to tell me God exists. I saw God in front of me in these people! I was fortunate to have met them; I cannot possibly imagine what my fate would have been had I not met them. They fundamentally changed me! [...] I got close to Church and Christianity through my work on Pitești. Paradoxically, the stories of religion-based tortures in Pitești revealed to me that the Communists accepted the existence of God. They would not have attempted such great efforts against God had they not admitted His existence and importance. So, from an atheist, I became I believer. Also, I met many former prisoners who were strong believers in God and had no hard feelings towards their aggressors, unlike me who felt the need for vengeance. They had no such feelings, they were content. I later realized their attitude is far superior to mine. It is a superior way of understanding life. I was the stupid one. When I saw that extraordinary

people reached such conclusions – also towards loving one’s country, a topic I was laughing about at the time – I realized I am no one compared to them. For me it was a whole process, I did not need to demonstrate anything to anyone.’

In another instance, Mr. Mureşan feels the need to mention the pillars he perceives as fundamental in his meaning-making and decisional processes: Christianity, patriotism, and personal assumption of responsibility for societal change. These pillars are in accordance with the aforementioned ontological transformation brought about by the interaction with the political prisoners:

‘Faith is the foundation. Love for my country. Responsibility, what I am doing is not for myself.’

The theme of personal assumption of responsibility comes back into the discussion when Mr. Mureşan details the goals of his established NGO called The Centre for Studies in Contemporary History. The perceived nature of this project is revealed by his choice of words, such as ‘popularize events’, ‘reach people’, ‘trigger interest’, ‘build community’, ‘explain’, and ‘pay it forward’. The regenerative function of this initiative is expressed through his hopes that the perceived negative effects of the Communist regime can be ‘fixed’ once people are made aware of how much these effects still influence modern-day Romania. In fact, one way of making sense of the discussed topic is by linking the theme of personal assumption of responsibility with another major theme of the interview: the persistence of individual and practices of the former Communist apparatus in the contemporary Romanian society. Mr. Mureşan bluntly links the poor economic development of post-1989 Romania to the highly corrupt nature of former

cadres of the Communist secret police who became wealthy in the newly established capitalist society based on access to formerly state-owned resources:

'The main goal is to popularize the events which took place during the Communist times, and especially the repressive aspects. We try to reach people who had limited access to this version of history. We try to trigger their interest in knowing more than we are able to teach them. We also try to build a community of people interested in history who can later pay it forward. [...] We have to explain to people how much they are still affected by the Communist period, what calamities we inherited from the Communist times and how they can be fixed, why is Romania stolen as it is today. If you look at the top ten wealthiest Romanians today, you will most likely discover they are directly or indirectly linked to the Securitate. This is not a coincidence. Resources got into the hands of those who had access to them. The influence of Communism on our daily lives is much stronger than we may be willing to admit.'

Mr. Mureșan continues making sense of the persistence of Communist elements by proposing it as the reason for the Sighet Memorial Museum remaining the only memorial project dedicated to the repressive aspects of the Communist regime. While speaking of the corrupt and interest-driven nature of Romanian politicians, he manages to add further elements to the image of modern Romania:

'One reason is the direct or indirect followers of the Communists who are still ruling the country. And another one is that anyone who comes to power in Romania does it for getting rich, so the crimes of Communism are not on their agenda. While intellectuals in power were too few and had too little power.'

In the same line, he continues attributing meaning to the theme of the persistence of values, practices, and individuals from the Communist regime in the post-1989 Romanian society by placing it in the context of censoring initiatives he has experienced during his work and research in the field of Communist repression. The perceived magnitude of this censorship is expressed in categorical concepts such as ‘omnipresent’, ‘absolutely cannot touch’, or ‘completely cut out from history’. Mr. Mureșan’s open and proactive acts of defiance against censoring initiatives reveal a personality which places Truth and Freedom at its core. For someone who has embraced Christianity under the influence of the former political prisoners, this attitude exposes deeper meanings considering Truth and Freedom are the fundamental drivers and ultimate life goals for Christian believers. It can be critically assumed that Mr. Mureșan’s establishment of an NGO in order to evade censoring initiatives is perceived as a continuation of the political prisoners’ acts of defiance and resistance in the name of their values and belief. Again, he employs irony – ‘I should be grateful to my censors’ - for making sense of this aspect:

‘Censorship due to ideological reasons is still omnipresent. It is still evident there are certain topics you absolutely cannot touch! Plus, the obstructions from other public institutions, which either are the continuers of pre-1989 institutions or employ many people who were formed by and had mentors and relatives among the Communists. The research process is further slowed down by incompetence and laziness. [...] Some topics and historical figures disturb certain groups, who would prefer them completely cut out from history according to the present-day ideology. This is a big aberration which always comes from politics! History should not be affected by the ideological trends! [...] At the time I established the NGO censorship was rather directly practiced in the IICCMER. I

had several such experiences. I do not like scandals and showing off, but I am very stubborn. So, telling me I am not allowed to do a certain thing or touch a certain topic is the best way to determine me to do that thing or touch that topic at any risks. I realized I should be grateful to my censors – which I cannot still be, I admit. I established the NGO with the purpose of publishing what I was forbidden to publish at the IICCMER. Eventually, it developed and grew far bigger than I ever dreamed it could be. But I could not step aside!’

Beyond practical issues such as censorship, Mr. Mureșan feels the need to make sense of the investigated topic by narrating emotional hardship and struggle he has faced while recording political prisoners’ testimonies of familial dramas caused by their imprisonment. His perception of the nature of these experiences is expressed through words such as ‘destroying families’, ‘terrible’, ‘horrible’, and ‘broke a society’, while the magnitude of similar stories he has heard is expressed through the repetition of ‘many’. Mr. Mureșan’s focus on familial dramas critically reveals deeper meanings, considering Family is one of the fundamental pillars of worldly life for Romanians, with strong archaic and Christian symbols and rituals attached. His acknowledged and assumed compassionate also hold deeper meanings for a declared Christian believer such as Mr. Mureșan, considering Compassion is one of the main values promoted by Christianity. He brings again in the discussion the theme of personal assumption of responsibility, this time in the context of taking upon oneself the prisoners’ life stories and perceived suffering:

'I always felt destroying families is the most horrible thing the Communists did. The case of Traian Popescu was terrible. He confessed to me that he was not content with not being able to have children because of the beatings he received in prison. He eventually died of testicular cancer. [...] I remember another former prisoner whose wife was six-months pregnant upon his arrest. He met his daughter in a prison visiting room when she was six years old. Many, many, many such stories! [...] Beyond all the beatings and tortures, I find this to be the truly important crime: they broke a society. [...] What is hard as a historian is to live with the horrible life experiences of the political prisoners. I am a very empathetic person, and I took the prisoners' life stories upon myself in a completely unhealthy manner. This is something one has to assume responsibility for when researching such topics.'

Having thoroughly made sense of the transformational effect of facing the history of the Communist repression on his own personality and life, Mr. Mureșan feels the need to also tackle this aspect on a societal level. He vividly depicts the persistence of Communist elements in the contemporary Romanian society as 'filth under your carpet', and he argues for the cleansing and regenerative role of confronting painful and sensitive historical memory. He expresses his strong opinions on this matter through categorical labels, such as 'perfectly immature', 'completely unhealthy', and 'absolutely fundamental':

'Running away from problems is a perfectly immature attitude. This is applicable in your daily life and in historiography. Many people do this, but it is a completely unhealthy attitude. Sooner or later it reaches you and hits you much stronger than it would have

had you confronted it from the beginning. This situation also applies to historical memory. You cannot move forward as a society until you check and clean the filth under your carpet. This is absolutely fundamental for a healthy society! Of course, we can pretend nothing happened and that everything is pink as if a guillotine completely separated pre- and post-1989 Romania and new people who have absolutely no connection to the Communist times appeared overnight. This is a childish approach. So, ignoring these aspects of history is the attitude of people who either have something to hide or are very immature.'

One societal group he focuses on to make sense of this transformational effect is the Romanian youth. Mr. Mureşan perceives young generations of Romanians educated with the knowledge of what the Communist regime represented as the solid foundation on which the regeneration of Romania can be achieved. He makes sense of this aspect by bringing back in the discussion the themes of censoring attempts and the personal assumption of responsibility for defying such attempts. He places this aspect in the context of a documentary movie they produced for teaching youngsters the history of the Communist regime in Romania. One means he employs to express his perception is irony when he is inviting his censors to censor the entire internet:

'You cannot build a sturdy and lasting house without a solid foundation. The past is this solid foundation. We decided to distribute the documentary movie for screening to schools and high-schools for free following a scandal of censorship we were dragged in. We realized there are strong interests for our movie not to be known and watched. So, we asked ourselves what we can do to popularize this documentary to the point of them not

being able to stop it. We took the decision to offer it for free to educators, and at some point, we will also upload it for free online watching. I would love to see them trying to censor the entire internet. Many young people become very receptive to this history. Children are much cleaner on the inside than we are, so they strongly resonate with the intensity and absurdity of the dramas of the political prisoners.'

Another theme he introduces to his meaning-making process is that of justice, and he speaks of it in the context of the recent sentencing of a former Communist prison commander, Alexandru Vişinescu, to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. One way of making sense of this theme is by calling for crimes of Communist regimes to be given the same importance as those of the Nazi regime. Mr. Mureşan also speaks about the regenerative and curative functions of such judicial acts on the Romanian society in terms of facing, accepting, and coming to peace with the recent past. In so doing, he combines the theme of justice with two other large themes previously tackled – the transformational role of encountering the history of the former political prisoners, and the personal assumption of responsibility for individual and societal change. For a declared Christian believer such as Mr. Mureşan, it is presumed that the theme of justice also holds metaphysical meanings. In this case, the worldly justice is mirroring the Biblical chapter of the Final Judgement when the soul of the deceased may be granted passage to the Heavens based on a judgment of his or her worldly deeds:

'Justice is still needed on a symbolic level. I would be curious to see if the same speech applies to Nazis who killed people in concentration camps. It is never too late for righteousness and justice. As a nation, we completely lack this aspect of coming to peace

with the past. [...] As a nation, we have not had a process of atonement. All the reasoning I heard was that those were the times, that they followed orders. This is the typical answer we get. I have not heard any of them admit they did something wrong and mention regrets. [...] On a personal level, I feel absolutely no satisfaction seeing an old man in prison. But we cannot keep on moving forward with no one found guilty for the thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of political prisoners. This is unacceptable! Someone is guilty of this, we must know them, and symbolically convict those found guilty on evidence. It is too little, it is too soon, but I believe it is a healing process for us as a nation to assume responsibility for this past.'

When referring particularly to the Sighet Memorial Museum, Mr. Mureșan praises its educational and pioneering roles, but he criticizes the perceived old-fashioned style of interpretation and the developers' decision to refurbish and beautify the original state of the prison. In so doing, he portrays an image of the development and management of the museum which reflects the Romanian society as a whole:

'Its merits are in pioneering this topic in Romania. I believe it is slightly stuck in the past, and that renovating the former prison was an unfortunate decision. I also believe it mirrors today's Romanian society: a private initiative in a field which should be publicly-managed, which says a lot about how the Romanian society still functions.'

Another way he chooses to attribute meaning to the Sighet Memorial is by placing it in the context of recent societal discussions for the development of a museum focused on the history of the Communist regime in the capital city. Mr. Mureșan reiterates his perception of the dramatic effects of the Communist times on the contemporary Romanian

society to imperatively call for this new memorial project to present a complex and holistic image of the Communist regime instead of only the crimes committed. His keen interest in and enthusiasm with this museal initiative are expressed in exclamatory remarks and the repetition of ‘definitely needed’ and ‘essentially needed’:

‘It is definitely needed, but I think we need a Museum of Communism, not just one of the Communist crimes! We cannot simply erase 45 years of this nation’s history and pretend they never existed. Especially since they were dramatic, they influenced generations, and they completely changed the fabric of Romanian society. Such a museum is essentially needed, and I think it is important to have it in Bucharest!’

- **Portrait Number 13: Mr. Gheorghe Mihai Bârlea**

Relevance to Study: Director of the Sighet Memorial Museum (2001-2007). Former member of the Communist Party before 1989. Founding member of the Civic Academy Foundation. Prefect of the Maramureş County (1997-2000). Senator in the Romanian Senate (2008-2012).

Upon hearing the topic of investigation, Mr. Bârlea begins his meaning-making process by providing what he believes to be relevant biographical information. Born in a village close to Sighetu Marmăției, the provided data reveals a life-long identitarian bond between him and the region, as evident in his blunt self-identification with Sighet:

'I was born on 10.02.1951 in a village on the Iza Valley. I have degrees in Philosophy and Law. I have a PhD in Sociology. I am currently a Professor in Baia Mare. I used to be an adviser for the Department of Culture in the Maramureș County. I was a Prefect of the County and a member of the Romanian Senate. [...] I am a Sighet person!'

Having mentioned his connection to the region, Mr. Bârlea explicitly states his direct and active connection with the Sighet Memorial. The label 'institution of memory' denotes the physical and metaphysical role of this museographic endeavor:

'I am among the founding members of the Civic Academy Foundation. I was a member of the Senate of the Civic Alliance. The Foundation was developed with an explicit goal of developing an institution of memory: the Sighet Memorial.'

Extensive and detailed sections of his meaning-making process revolve around his involvement in the development of the former Sighet Prison into a memorial museum. Through repetition, he feels the need to emphasize how difficult such an initiative was in the initial years after the 1989 Revolution due to censoring remnants of the former Communist regime. Words such as 'sacrifices', 'extraordinary', and 'extremely brave' expose a perceived heroic attitude of the museum developers. The label '*topos* of national memory' infuses the site with meaning which calls for collective cohesion in remembering the victims of Communism:

'When we started the project, this place was a ruin. People had been using it as a storage space for random items. We mostly started with donations from former political prisoners living abroad. Without Blandiana and Rusan's sacrifices, this project could not have been realized in those murky political times when the mentalities were not yet sanitized towards

this historical past. [...] I initiated the first symposiums about the Sighet Prison. In January 1993 I met Ana Blandiana and Romulus Rusan in Bucharest, at the headquarters of the Civic Alliance. Step by step we managed to develop in Sighet a topos of national memory, an extraordinary and extremely brave thing to do in those times.'

While narrating his active participation in the creation of the Sighet Museum, Mr. Bârlea introduces one of the leitmotifs of his meaning-making: the transformational-educational role of the memorial establishment. Adding dramatism to his narrative is a sequence of leading Romanian figures of high intellectual and moral standards who were imprisoned in the Sighet Prison by the Communist authorities. Peoples' lack of awareness about such historical aspects reveals itself as the driving force behind Mr. Bârlea decision to involve in the memorial project. The transformational-educational function of the Sighet Museum gains strong metaphysical meanings. For him, accessing the information about the victims of Communism displayed in the Sighet Memorial symbolically resembles accessing Truth which is a fundamental pillar of Christianity:

'After the first symposium, I printed out the portraits of the dignitaries who had been imprisoned here, stuck them to the windows of the Memorial and waited to see peoples' reactions. Some did not know anything, while others knew a few details but nothing in depth. They could read that these former political prisoners were members of the Romanian Academy, professors, politicians who had unified the nation, important members of the clergy. I read on their faces a spectacular and dramatic astonishment. I remember one woman saying: >>What great people were locked in here, and we had absolutely no idea!<< Between us and Truth was a wall stronger than the prison walls,

and it was this stronger wall which has to be brought down. The Sighet Memorial represents the starting point for bringing down this wall.'

Having already touched upon censoring remnants of the former Communist regime in post-1989 Romania, Mr. Bârlea details these influences on societal, psychological, cultural, and governmental levels when describing reactions to their initial memorial projects focused on the Sighet Prison. Besides openly narrating virulent attacks, he makes sense and adds further dramatism to the narrative through the use of irony ('we are accelerating our own destinies') and rhetorical questions:

'Peoples' reactions to our project were very diverse. Some appreciated that something was finally done about this, while others reacted with hostility. Some believed that history is not clear at all and that we are accelerating our own destinies. There were direct and strong attacks in government-managed newspapers. >>The Voice of Romania<< argued that we are trying to sell the memory of Romania's great leaders to foreigners. All sort of reactions motivated by the fact that certain individuals did not want us to dig out the past as we were supposed to let the oppressors live a relaxed life and not deeply investigate what had happened during this regime. These events can also reveal how deeply affected peoples' mentality was by the Communist-style education. One can only wonder how come people are not curious to find out the reality of their times in the aftermath of such a terrible historical period?!'

The continuation of censoring aspects from Communism into present-day Romania and their censoring and disabling effects on memorial initiatives becomes a leitmotif of Mr. Bârlea's meaning-making. One societal context he comes back to several

times throughout the interview is the educational system in general and history curriculum in particular. This reveals emotional implication presumably linked to the fact that he himself has chosen an academic career and an active involvement in history-focused memorial projects. This emotional involvement is expressed through a series of assumptions and imperative remarks:

'As a professor, I am concerned with the unjustified reluctance in tackling Communism in all its perspectives. This is like running away from yourself. Finding refuge in the future to escape the past is both practically and logically impossible. My speculation is that my history professors who were formed during the Communist regime had found themselves in cowardly moments before and may feel not entitled to analyze this regime in the present. [...] The issue of school history books is absolutely embarrassing! Not even one Minister of Education assumed the moral responsibility of fixing up the curriculum. [...] We are yet to develop a convincing institutional and educational system. Historians usually have a certain reluctance when tackling topics of recent history. I believe more courage is needed!'

Having already tackled historical censorship on different societal levels, Mr. Bârlea turns his attention purposefully to the interpretation at the Sighet Museum. His recurring references to Truth with its biblical connotations reveal a metaphysical component of his personality around which his involvement in memorial initiatives revolves. In several instances during the interview and stretching across his lifespan Mr. Bârlea associates speaking Truth with an act of courage and morality. The frequency of

these associations exposes an assumed permanent struggle against the remnants of the Communist past also frequently mentions throughout the interview:

'There were many pressures put on us in relation to what history we should present in the Museum. A group of rabbis visited Sighet and – due to being wrongly informed – refused to visit the Memorial if any member of the Legionary Movement is depicted in the interpretation. I chose to remain true to our interpretation and told them that we are depicting the anti-Communist resistance, no matter the political affiliation or preference of its members. We must be critical and balanced when presenting history. Being selective based on personal criteria means going back to Communist methods. [...] In 1980 I was teaching at a local high-school in Sighet. I had the courage to tell my students that some important dignitaries had been imprisoned there. I did this because I did not want my students to ever accuse me of lying to them in the future. Later, I could look my students in the eyes with dignity. [...] Later, I met Ciolpan [the former director of the Sighet Prison] and Satmari [the Securitate officer responsible for the Sighet Prison] in town. In 1997, Ciolpan was bound to be decorated in the town square for his contribution in the World War. I spoke out immediately and acted against such an offensive measure. In the end, they canceled the decoration. I did not care for my position and benefits; it was a moral responsibility. I still get threats from Ciolpan's son-in-law for affecting his father-in-law's image.'

On other occasions, Mr. Bârlea goes deeper in making sense of the root causes of his subsequent choice to get involved in actions focused on the memorialization and commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime. His choice of words to describe

the personality of the former political prisoners he came in contact with – ‘dignity’, ‘verticality’, ‘no hatred or vengeance’, ‘exceptional moral beauty’, ‘authentic faith’ – reveals a deep admiration which is presumed to have had a decisive influence on his own personality and life choices. His emphasis on the prisoners’ perception of suffering as a divine challenge combined with frequent remarks touching on fundamental Christian concepts such as Truth, Compassion, or Justice expose a metaphysical side of his personality and meaning-making. This is clear in instances when he defines his contribution to the Sighet Museum as a matter of conscience and moral. His emotional involvement is also evident when he talks about his strong feelings of frustration and when he imperatively calls for the condemnation of totalitarian regimes:

‘What impressed me the most when meeting former political prisoners was the dignity and verticality of many of them. I did not find in them motivations for hatred or vengeance. In fact, I found more of these in their heirs. I met people of exceptional moral beauty, driven by an authentic faith. Most of the former convicts perceived their time in prison as a challenge God had bestowed upon them to test and strengthen their faith. Some would say they felt freer in the prison than they did on the outside, where they would see the moral decay the society had fallen in. [...] For a long time, I lived with a strong feeling of frustration knowing that my generation was denied access to Truth. We were subjected to a perverse process of ideologization. We had no idea of what really happened in Sighet, Gherla, and across the country. Among us - the intellectuals - we had some access to the confessions of former political prisoners, but we could not have possibly imagined the magnitude of the oppression. [...] For me getting involved was a matter of conscience. I had already known some things, but it was a moral duty to find out more about what had

happened during my lifetime and to let others also know about this. The Communists confiscated the youth of many generations. I believe that no clear mind has the moral right to be indifferent to the suffering of fellow humans who suffered in the prisons of any totalitarian regime in the name of their values. Any totalitarian regime is abominable to human history, and it should be condemned accordingly!’

Having already emotionally and imperatively asked for the proper condemnation of authoritarian regimes, Mr. Bârlea brings in the theme of justice in the context of the recent condemnation of former Communist prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu for crimes against humanity. He emphasizes the metaphysical and transformational role of this act. Rather than seeing it as a worldly legislative verdict, Mr. Bârlea perceives it as a symbolical decision reached through collective remembrance which can lay the healthy foundation for the moral regeneration of the Romanian society. Since he already labeled the Sighet Museum an institution of national memory, it is presumed that Mr. Bârlea subconsciously perceived the memorial as a ‘moral point of reference’ which can facilitate the ‘judgment of history’. The Christian component of his meaning-making reveals itself again since Justice and Truth are fundamental pillars of Christian belief:

‘Vişinescu is but one person. Had the post-1989 regimes been more courageous in dealing with these abominable facts, most likely our subsequent development as a nation would have been clearer and healthier. We have delayed healing our society by not tackling our recent history. The judgment of history is not necessarily done in a tribunal, but in the collective memory and mentality. This way, it becomes a point of reference. When the

moral point of reference and the historical Truth are assumed in one's system of values, it becomes more meaningful than a judicial decision.'

Mr. Bârlea employs a similar style of spiritual-focused sense-making when detailing the importance of facing up to the painful and sensitive aspects of national history. References to 'Good' and 'Evil', 'Truth', 'respect the dead', 'altars', 'sacred places' reinforce the deeply Christian aspect of his meaning-making and expose a perceived divine nature of memorial initiatives such as the Sighet Museum. Additional references to 'dignity', 'patriot', 'identity', 'roots', and the past-present-future continuum depict endeavors such as the Sighet Museum as safe keepers and transmitters of national heritage and values across generations. In the same line, the former political prisoners are perceived as holy figures and promoted as role models of morality and dignity:

'We need more points of reference for this historical period. Young generations must understand what this regime was! [...] Evil has the highest frequency of repetition throughout history. Not knowing Evil, not spotting it out to future generations increases the risk of repetition. It is also a matter of dignity. He who does not know how to respect the dead does not know how to respect the living either. You cannot label yourself a >>patriot<< and ignore or forget about the sacrifices of those before you. When it comes to totalitarian regimes, prisons should be seen as altars. Any place where someone died for an idea, for the common Good, should be perceived as a sacred place. [...] You cannot assume responsibility for the future if you choose to remain indifferent to the past. [...] A modern society aiming at being durable needs to have Truth at its basis. A society running away from its own truths will end up losing its identity. It is a matter of morality, of

identity. We have to ethically back up the political and social actions, as well as our personal lives. We need values which are inspired by both historical and present-day contexts. Without roots, without values, our lives are based on chaotic and random experiences. We need human role models, we need dignified and significant actions to base our present-day actions on.'

In the same line of the popularization of the history of Communist repression, Mr. Bârlea tackles the recent discussions about the development of a museum dedicated to such history in the capital city. While supportive of such memorial initiatives, he expresses his indignation with the fact that the developers of the Sighet Museum have been excluded from these discussions which may lead to the new museum repeating what Sighet already depicts:

'Nowadays there are discussions on the need for a Museum of Communism. Very good idea! But I find it unacceptable to think about this while ignoring what we have in Sighet!'

Three short statements on the Sighet Museum come as a synthesis of Mr. Bârlea's meaning-making about the investigated topic. The metaphor 'Capital of Memory' reveals his perception of the site as a coagulating epicenter of various and contrasting aspects tackled throughout the interview such as suffering, fear, censorship, resistance, dignity, identity, or education. For him, the Sighet Museum is the place where moral judgment and regeneration can be achieved through collective remembrance of the victims of the Communist regime. It is the place where his personal and national destinies are inescapably intertwined. Through the filter of the aforementioned Biblical connotations, his final reference to Truth exposes his assumption of responsibility for involving in the

Sighet memorial project is not just a professional decision but a perceived answer to a divine call:

'The Sighet Museum is a Capital of Memory, not just a place of ethnographical importance. It is representative of the geography of detention in Romania. [...] The Sighet Museum is an initiative of conscience. I have been involved in its development from the beginning and will remain close to it until my final days. [...] I chose the path of siding with and supporting those who dig out and speak out the Truth!'

- **Portrait Number 14: Mr. Marius Voinaghi**

Relevance to Study: History professor at the 'Dragoș Vodă' high-school in Sighet.

One critical means – in time and details spent – used by Mr. Voinaghi for making sense of the investigated topic is personal childhood memories. With humor, he openly speaks of the Legionary Movement which is still a controversial and – in many contexts – taboo subject in the contemporary Romanian society. This critically reveals an outspoken personality with a strong preference for freedom of speech and opposed to (self)censorship. This is reinforced by narrated stories of secretly listening to a forbidden radio station and of a sustained familial open opposition to the Communist regime. The fact that he speaks of the Royal Family (rulers of Romania before the Communist Party seized power) and of Radu Câmpeanu and Ion Rațiu (leaders of the historical – Liberal and Peasant - political parties heavily purged by the Communist authorities) reveals a

strong preference for political movements which defended and supported individual freedom. Anecdotally highlighting his early preference for such political movements against his parents' support for Ion Iliescu (the first president of post-1989 Romania, a former member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Romania) adds strength to his narrative. He feels the need to emphasize the positive effect the Students' Strike of 1995 – the largest student movement in the history of Romania – had on his personality. Considering his chosen educational profession, this statement exposes a teaching attitude which encourages freedom of expression. Mr. Voinaghi adds a metaphysical aspect to the narrative of his upbringing by mentioning the natural role religion played in this childhood:

'My grandfather influenced me greatly. He used to be a member of the Legionary Movement and always told me not to wear the >>fascist<< uniform. He told me about the Royal Family, and with him, I would listen to Radio Free Europe. His biggest dream was to see the Communist regime fall...not just fall but be crushed! If in my wife's family they switched to Hungarian when discussing against the regime, in my family we would discuss openly this. Of course, such discourse affected me. After the Revolution, I was mostly self-taught. I had conflicts with my family during the first free elections: I was supporting Rațiu and Câmpeanu, my parents supported Iliescu. What greatly influenced me was the Students' Strike. [...] As a child I was taken to Church regularly, we also had classes of religion. It was a natural part of life back then.'

Under the umbrella of childhood memories, Mr. Voinaghi stresses on several occasions the ontological transformation he experienced due to being educated at the

‘Dragoș Vodă’ high-school in Sighet. He particularly mentions the influence of his history professor on his subsequent assumed profession. In the second instance, he makes sense of the topic by speaking of his upbringing in a perceived typical Communist environment, of the influence of his history professor, and of his active anti-Communist attitude at and after the 1989 Revolution. The adjoining of these statements critically reveals an assumed and conscious transformational process, while the details spent in narrating his upbringing and education uncover a perceived identitarian connection with Sighet and its history. The mentioning of the ‘12:08 East of Bucharest’ movie – one of the most well-known movies among Romanians during which three characters debate on whether or not a real revolution took place in their town – as a teaching material in his class reinforces his preference for critical thinking and freedom of expression. He also feels the need to speak of God, which depicts historical education as a perceived vocation of divine nature:

‘The most defining aspect of my personality is Dragoș Vodă. I always wonder...what would I be now without my formative years at Dragoș Vodă? Meeting an exceptional professor makes the whole difference in a young person’s life. [...] I was in high-school. I am subjective when it comes to this topic, as I always think about >>12:08 East of Bucharest<<, a movie I obviously play for my students. I got some photographs from my history professor which influenced my whole perception. I grew up in a working-class, Communist neighborhood. I remember I broke into the public library, got the books and portraits of the Beloved Leader and set them on fire. [...] I am a history professor at the Dragoș Vodă high-school in Sighet. I also graduated from this high-school and I chose the history path thanks to a fascinating history professor I had in high-school. I became a history professor in 1997 and I can wholeheartedly say I am doing what I love: being a

history professor at the Dragoș Vodă high-school! I am planning to issue a biographical book of the high-school in 2019, but otherwise...may God help me!'

In a different moment of the interview, he narrates his perceived transformation as part of the 'Dragoș Vodă' high-school by linking it to the sustained anti-Communist actions in the region. On this occasion he introduces the lack of awareness of the anti-Communist resistance because of censoring authorities as a driving force behind his chosen path:

'Maramureș has a tradition of anti-Communist resistance, including those who fought directly, those who opposed collectivization, and so on. [...] Many of those who fought against the Communists were formed at Dragoș Vodă high-school. However, few know about them. It remains a taboo subject because of the censoring legislation.'

In another instance he employs dark humor to explain this perceived censorship by addressing another major topic of his sense-making process - the continuation of the pre-1989 Communist system into the contemporary Romanian society:

'Those who were responsible for atrocities before 1989 knew their best option is to allow memory to fade out through life's natural course: death. You know the saying: >>Communism has not died, it is just resting!<<.'

This theme of continuation is thoroughly made sense of by Mr. Voinaghi through examples of features which he connects to the perceived slow and chaotic progress of the post-1989 Romanian society: a highly centralized and pyramidal system which does not value meritocracy but obedience. His critique of such aspects cements individual

assumption of responsibility for acting and speaking out for the common good as the foundation of his meaning-making process:

'We have been used to a centralized system where the smaller establishments have to listen to the capital city. It is the Pavlovian conditioning. But I know exactly what I need to do in my town, I do not need to be told from any center. [...] The problems are known but ignored. We know problems must be solved bottom-top, but the system is still top-bottom. [...] A main flaw of the Romanian society is that we have the right person in the wrong place. It all starts in 8th grade when the young students are asked to choose a few options for continuing their education. Due to the allocation system for high-schools, students interested in biochemistry may end up doing something they are not interested in such as history. This reflects and extends to the entire society. Plus, people doing what others tell them to do.'

Another way he makes sense of the theme of continuation of pre-1989 Communist practices and values into the contemporary Romanian society is by expressing his disappointment with President Emil Constantinescu⁴⁹'s mandate. His references to 'our second revolution' and 'leftist' are allusions to the fact that those who came to power in the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution were members of the previous Communist apparatus who perpetuated certain practices he has mentioned previously in the interview. In his perception, such practices have broken the fiber of the Romanian society, as suggested by Mr. Voinaghi's expressed hope that a non-leftist head of state would 'fix' what the

⁴⁹ Emil Constantinescu – President of Romania (1996-2000), supported by the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party.

previous ones have altered. His subjective involvement is evident through the use of open assumptions of emotion and exclamatory remarks:

'I have a feeling of unfulfillment about the mandate of Emil Constantinescu. That was our second revolution! Finally, someone who was not a leftist, that is when things could have been fixed!'

Mr. Voinaghi employs dark humor again to make sense of the persistence of practices and values of the Communist regime, this time in the context of recent societal discussions about investigating the crimes of the Communist regime. The national TV station lived was a strategic point during the 1989 Revolution, and it is colloquially and humorously known among Romanians that the first words spoken on the liberated station were 'Mircea, pretend you are working!'. The anecdotal use of this story reflects Mr. Voinaghi's disappointment with the condition of the contemporary Romanian society through the filter of the hopes during the Revolution while revealing humor as both a coping mechanism and instrument for sense-making:

'The first words on the freed national television were: >>Mircea, pretend you are working!<< [>>Mircea, fă-te că lucrezi!<<]. So, many years later, we are still living in a staged play. We pretend to be working; they pretend to give laws to the people. So, on the one hand, we say we want to solve the crimes of the Communist regime, on the other hand, we know the guilty ones are all around us, and we would not trial a friend or even ourselves.'

The fact that he brings back this theme of continuation on several other occasions and spends a considerable amount of time and detail to portray the situation in his assumed

professional vocation reveals both his passion for education and his perceived bitterness with the current state of affairs. The central narrative point is the leitmotif of the entire interview: freedom of expression. To it, he attaches ideals of ‘opposition’, ‘justice’, or ‘moral reparations’. He also contrasts it with the fear, censorship, formalism, and benefit-driven attitudes of his peers. The use of Edmund Burke’s quote ‘the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing’ in this context reveals he perceives those speaking out for societal ideals as ‘good men’ unlike those who do not speak out for fear of losing benefits. In his sense-making process, he employs a mix of personal experience, colloquial sayings, humor, rhetorical questions, and foul language to provide a detailed insider perspective on the politics and power games of historical school education in contemporary Romania:

‘The history professors as a caste have lost their spirit of opposition. We have entered a certain formalism which disables us from discussing as freely as we used to. Self-censorship still plays a very important role. When you have nothing to lose, you can discuss and debate as freely as you want. When you are over 40 and you have 2-3 kids to take care of, you lose interest for social, national, or historical justice, moral reparations, although >>the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.<< If each of us adopted this politics of the ostrich, who would be left to speak about such matters?! It reminds me of the Communist saying >>the last one out should switch off the light<<. It is like we are cursed. Almost 30 years later we are in the same place. [...] The fear of speaking out is nice and warm. In the professors’ council, we just decide as we used to during the Communist times. The moment you start questioning certain aspects or decisions, they start keeping a close eye on you. Sometimes I just get

up and say >>for the sake of the vote, I abstain from voting. It is impossible that 70 professors think exactly the same!<< They tell me >>you are younger, we remember a saying from the Communist times: do not poke the beehive, you may get stung!<< All of this because you questioned the status quo from other perspectives. Still the dissimulated speech, still the fear that you may suffer repercussions – things like people avoiding you, like losing your social life, like not being respected anymore...although what kind of respect is this in the first place? Before you knew that you might get some benefits if you sell your soul if you do small favors for others. This mentality is still present. For example, you will not be called anymore to grade Baccalaureate exams, thus you lose money, or you are excluded from the list for subsidized seaside holidays. So, I start wondering if it is worth speaking out my mind. Or is it better to pretend I have seen nothing and that I do not know much? This is the mechanism. It is highly appreciated if you do not raise any questions, as the boss had already decided, and the voting is just a formality. We do not use the concept of >>you have to<< as the Communists did, it was replaced with >>it would be highly appreciated if...<< The boss was also informed before by superiors, who had themselves been informed by their superiors and so on. This is how centralism works. And if anything goes bad, each will say they only did their job, and they are not responsible for anything. Then you start calculating your options. You know the saying >>do not piss against the wind!<<'

One other major theme of the interview - which Mr. Voinaghi directly connects to the leitmotif of freedom of expression – is the personal assumption of responsibility for educational initiatives focused on the history and memory of the victims of Communist totalitarianism. In different moments throughout the interview, he details his practical

approach to teaching. One word which he repeats several times in these statements is ‘debate’, to which he adds related ones such as ‘discuss’, ‘contrasting views’, ‘read’, ‘ask’, ‘think’ or ‘interpret’. Contrasted against concepts of ‘propaganda’ or ‘sensitive’ topics, this narrated approach to teaching reinforces the profound existential importance Mr. Voinaghi attributes to freedom of expression and critical thinking.

‘For the course in the History of Communism, I arrange the class as I would for a discussion or a seminar. I encourage group work because there are a lot of materials which sometimes hold contrasting views. So, debates are a great tool for this class! My purpose is not to turn my students into anti-Communists, this would be a stupid thing to do. I give them small assignments linked to their own families. I ask them when did their father or grandfather graduate and invite them to write something on the context of that particular year. The fact that they discuss in their families about the optional class and about the assignment I think it is the most important gain. Then we openly discuss and debate their answers in class. This way it is easy to see who and how is influencing the students at home. [...] I give students facts, not propaganda. I present all sides, even those sensitive ones, and I encourage them to read further, to ask themselves questions, to think and interpret for themselves.’

Adding spatial and temporal scales to his meaning-making process are statements which contextualize Mr. Voinaghi’s teaching approach in the contemporary world and times. In narrating the features of young generations of Romanians, he adds a new perspective to his portrayal of the post-1989 Romanian society. His emphasis on needing

to continuously upgrade his teaching approach to meet societal trends suggests a strong dedication to an assumed vocation:

'Today's children are much more receptive and open-minded than we were at their age. But they get bored easily because of old-fashioned ways of teaching. [...] It also matters a lot the person speaking to them. If you have not managed to catch their attention within the first 10-12 minutes, it is almost impossible to do it afterward. [...] The world has opened up! The student may be better traveled and more informed than the professor. [...] My methods of teaching are normal for the times we are living. We moved away from the times of the all-knowing professor, from the pure top-bottom approach. [...] A history professor nowadays has much more responsibility to oneself and to society than 10 years ago. [...] Plus, the history professor must constantly update one's knowledge of geopolitics, on sensitive cultural or religious matters, not just on remembering dates and events.'

Another important theme Mr. Voinaghi introduces through the narratives of his teaching approach is that of justice. He places his meaning-making process in the context of the recent condemnation of the former commander of the Râmnicu Sărat Penitentiary to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. He emphasizes the essential moral value of such a conviction. He expresses his hope for such a symbolic gesture by repeating the sonic analogy 'click' to portray the noise made when locking the prison cell door. He further makes sense of this topic by contrasting Romania's public investment in the investigation of Communist crimes against similar initiatives in other former Communist European nations:

'When students ask me about my opinion on Vişinescu's conviction to prison, I tell them that, for all the atrocities he has committed, even a one-day conviction is needed only for him to hear the sound of the prison cell from the inside. He should hear that >>click<< made when locking the cell door. It is getting more and more complicated as time goes by. We should have aimed at finishing this moral cleansing in the 2000s. How come the Hungarians, the Germans, the Poles or the Czechs have managed to do this? Our IICCMER has 30-40 employees, in Poland they have thousands. [...] It is definitely not too late for justice to be made! I do not give my students such arguments, but I tell them, for example, that Coposu forgot how to speak while he was imprisoned at Râmnicu Sărat. Imagine the impact this has on a 16-year old student. Let's try to finally understand what happened during those years. I find it normal for those responsible to hear the >>click<< of the prison door being locked from the inside. We should not just focus on his current age. When he did those despicable things, he was in his prime years. We have to place the actions in the right context.'

When speaking directly about the Sighet Memorial, Mr. Voinaghi repeatedly expresses his gratitude as a history professor and a local to the museum developers for their initiative. He praises its educational function linked to its *in situ* nature, and portrays the transformational effect it has on first-time visiting students through subjective adjectives such as 'absolute', 'stronger', 'colossal' or 'shocked'. He also employs sarcasm to depict the practical importance of the museum because of poor teaching facilities at the Dragoş Vodă high-school:

'Being born here and being a history professor, I will thank Ana Blandiana on each occasion for what she had done here. Of course, it is of absolute importance to us, the history professors. The Memorial is a history lesson in itself, much stronger than anything I can teach the students. [...] Many of my colleagues bring pupils and students in primary or secondary school to the Memorial. It is a colossal moment when you see the shocked reaction of students who had never visited it before! [...] From the perspective of civic education, we are very lucky to have the Sighet Memorial close to us. I keep many of my classes at the Memorial, on specific themes. Due to lack of space and materials, we do not have a section for history inside the high-school where I can organize interactive sessions for my students, but I am lucky to be able to do this inside the Memorial. Imagine the students have tablets and iPhones, and I still have to teach on a map from the 1960s.'

In different moments, he delves deeper into expressing the importance of such memorial initiatives to be further supported and developed on a personal and statal level. While bringing back the leitmotif of freedom of expression, Mr. Voinaghi speaks of the ontological importance of history and memory towards the identitarian, cultural, and moral rejuvenation of Romania in the aftermath of the Communist regime. The words below come as a synthesis of his meaning-making on the topic as they adjoin Mr. Voinaghi's Truth and Freedom-driven personal experiences, approaches, and aspirations expressed in an outspoken and passionate manner:

'Any educational endeavor is needed and welcomed. [...] We should absolutely not try to forget this memory! We are history, and history is life itself! I am the best example, I always tell my students that I was educated by the Communists. Each family has some

taboo topics, which are not rummaged unless some triggers are employed. This is what I try to do for my students when giving them assignments. It is all about planting the seed in the right place. [...] I keep telling my students >>I wish you to become better than me! This is the whole purpose! Some of you need to stay in Romania and raise the cultural level of the nation!<< [...] I still believe the present times are the best Romania has had in the last 200 years. If you can speak, speak out freely!'

- **Portrait Number 15: Mr. Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor**

Relevance to Study: Dean of the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest (2004-2012). President of the Senate of the University of Bucharest (2011-2015). General director of the Diplomatic Institute of Romania (2005-2010, 2012). State Counsellor to President Emil Constantinescu (1998-2000). President of the Liberal Institute 'I.C. Brătianu' (2011-present).

Upon hearing the topic under investigation, Mr. Nistor begins his meaning-making process by detailing intimate childhood memories of his familial repression under the Communist regime. Such a narrative choice critically reveals childhood memories as central in his sense and decision-making processes. Also, his choice of words – such as 'persecuted', 'forcefully relocated', 'confiscated', 'banned', 'imprisoned' - exposes his perception of living under the Communist administration:

‘Some members of my family were persecuted. For example, my grandparents had considerable wealth. They were not involved in politics. They were forcefully relocated, and their properties and possessions were confiscated by the Communists. Other members of my family were political detainees. My father was banned from pursuing university studies. For many years during my childhood, I could meet people who had experienced the Communist prisons in my grandfather’s house. On my mum’s side, her family was of German ethnicity. My grandfather had been imprisoned in the Donbas labor camp for many years.’

In the same line, Mr. Nistor feels the need to delve deeper into his childhood memories in order to attribute meaning to the topic under investigation. Having discussed his family’s persecution under the Communist regime, he describes the influence of growing up around people who had been politically persecuted. This acknowledged and assumed influence is expressed through exclamatory statements such as ‘Of course, I was affected by this!’ and ‘Of course, this also affected me!’. The narrative connection between this influence and his choice of obtaining an education in the field of history exposes an ontological transformation brought to his life by the frequent interaction with victims of Communist repression. A means he chooses for making sense of this aspect is a narrative contrast between the information he gained from people who had experienced political persecution and the teaching materials in schools. References to Iuliu Maniu, Corneliu Coposu, and Ion Diaconescu – some of the most important political figures in modern Romania who actively opposed Communism and were imprisoned in different political penitentiaries – add further meaning and strength to his perceived ontological transformation:

‘One of those close to Iuliu Maniu was a marine commander called Mocanu. I remember this because it happened when I was in my last days of high-school, and I was preparing for passing the exam to enter the Faculty of History. Luckily, this was happening three years before they included social origin among the criteria for admission. Otherwise, I would most likely not have been able to pursue university education. One day he was visiting my grandfather. I started telling them something about 23rd August, and they listened to me carefully. It was the version I had been taught in school. Mr. Mocanu said he knew things differently as he had been directly involved in the actions I was narrating. Of course, I was affected by this! Another gentleman named Dan Alecu attended these meetings. He was a lawyer and very close to Corneliu Coposu and Diaconescu. Of course, this also affected me! The world in my grandfather’s house was completely different to the world on the streets or in my school.’

The theme of ontological transformation is consolidated when he feels the need to connect his transformation brought about by the encounters with victims of Communist political repression in his young formative years to his subsequent involvement in politics, diplomacy, and education. His emphasis on working as a State Counsellor to President Emil Constantinescu adds further meaning to the narrative considering President Constantinescu has been actively involved in projects aimed at the commemoration and memorialization of the victims of the Communist regime, such as the transformation of the Jilava Prison in a memorial and educational center and the development of the ‘Wings’ monument in 2017:

'My involvement in politics, historical research, and diplomacy happened as a natural transition and mix. I am a historian, but the right context brought me in the staff of President Constantinescu. At that time, he was the Dean of the University of Bucharest. He had surrounded himself by a considerable number of academics and young alumni. I had been active in the evolution of the Romanian society before the election of Emil Constantinescu. I was not active in the organized politics, but in the civil society. While a member of the presidential staff and a counselor of President Constantinescu I oversaw his external delegations, so I worked closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2005, Prime Minister Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu invited me to be the director of a newly developed institute: The Diplomatic Institute of Romania. My political options have always been transparently towards the Liberals. The invitation to candidate on the electoral lists of the Liberal Party came naturally. Even nowadays I am on the commission for external affairs of the Senate. So, what I am qualified in are education and external affairs.'

Another theme Mr. Nistor brings in the discussion to make sense of the investigated topic is the scarcity of educational programs focused on teaching young generations of Romanians the history of the Communist regime. Considering his eight-year experience as the Dean of the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest, his detailed portrayal comes as a reliable insider's depiction of the current state of affairs. His perception of the nature of this scarcity is expressed through statements such as 'the horrors [...] are not tackled' and 'reluctance to include these topics', and the repetition of words such as 'limit', 'force', and 'difficulty'. Mr. Nistor's reference to 'history educators still active' hints at the persistence of individuals from the former Communist regime in

the educational system of contemporary Romania. He continues attributing meaning to this theme by speaking of deliberate initiatives by legislative bodies to diffuse and distort the national history:

'For universities, this is the reality: the only academic institution which gathered the critical mass needed for teaching the history of the Communist regime is the Faculty of History in Bucharest. It is also true that the horrors of the Communist regime are not tackled. The school curriculum is built of cold information for now. There has always been a reluctance to include these topics in official history books at all educational levels. Maybe it is because of the type of history educators still active in our country. It is not easy teaching this topic, and this difficulty forced those who developed the curriculum to limit themselves. It is always difficult to discuss without hate and vengeance such a recent historical period. There is a tendency among certain bureaucrats to force educators to limit their ability to reach wider audiences like students. This is happening as we speak with a new legislative initiative which will make us the only nation in Europe where the study field called >>history<< will no longer exist.'

Having detailed his perception about the scarcity of educational courses focused on the history of the Communist regime and the effect coming in contact with this history has had on his own personality, Mr. Nistor continues in the same line by adding a collective perspective to the previously discussed theme of ontological transformation. More precisely, he feels the need to imperatively argue for the regenerative function of young generations of Romanians being educated about the victims and perpetrators of the Communist repression. In attributing meaning to this aspect, he brings in the discussion

another important theme of his meaning-making – justice – and places it in the context of the recent sentencing of former prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. Mr. Nistor’s perception of the nature of the Communist regime is expressed in concepts such as ‘grotesque’, ‘animals’, and ‘notorious criminals’. He repeatedly emphasizes the symbolic function of judicial acts towards the moral regeneration of the Romanian nation. His strong belief in this transformative role is expressed in absolutist words such as ‘must’, ‘absolute’, and ‘definitely’, while his emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed in a sustained imperative tone:

‘The Romanian youth must know history, especially contemporary history! It is an absolute form of knowing the recent past which has been grotesque from many perspectives! Look at what is happening with the almost symbolical sentencing of Vişinescu! This process should have started at the beginning of the 1990s which would have led to many more perpetrators being convicted! In that case, the consistency and effect of such judicial acts would have been much stronger! But, in the end, it is better late than never! It has a symbolical value! These people were animals, notorious criminals! The existence of these criminals was known all along! They should definitely be sentenced so that our people can know once and for all that morality must be driving social behavior!’

In the same line of educating the youth about the history of Communist political repression, Mr. Nistor introduces the theme of personal assumption of responsibility for such educational initiatives. From his role as the President of the Liberal Institute ‘I.C. Brătianu’, he feels the need to mention a youth-focused yearly project for the

popularization and commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime. The setting of this project in Sighetu Marmăției and the visits to the Sighet Memorial Museum expose a sustained personal connection with the site and its surroundings. Considering he has already spoken of deliberate attempts of distorting, diffusing or censoring the national history, Mr. Nistor's repeated emphasis on 'national identity' critically reveals identitarian regeneration as the main purpose of the youth-focused memorial projects he and the 'I.C. Brătianu' Institute have initiated:

'The >>I.C. Brătianu<< Institute has a project for the commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime, most of those who were members of the Liberal Party. Every year our institute organizes a summer school for young liberals in Sighetu Marmăției during which we also visit the Sighet Memorial Museum. A few years ago, the motto of the summer school was >>Memory as national identity<<. National identity is one thing, globalization is another thing. Globalization involves the co-existence in the same world of different national identities, and the free access and identitarian influences among these identities. The European identity is interesting because in many ways it does not disable the development of national identities.'

The regenerative role of initiatives for the commemoration and memorialization of the victims of the Communist regime remains Mr. Nistor's focus point when he refers precisely to the Sighet Memorial Museum. He attributes meaning to this regenerative function by metaphorically comparing the lack of education about the victims of the Communist repression to an 'infirmity' which can be 'fixed' by memorial projects such as the Sighet Memorial Museum. Similarly, he argues that such initiatives can ensure 'the

normal and coherent functioning of the Romanian nation'. His strong belief in the positive impact projects like the Sighet Memorial Museum is expressed through words such as 'clear', 'without any doubt', and 'absolutely beneficial', and through a sustained exclamatory tone:

'It is clear that the efforts of the museum developers and their subsequent initiatives such as summer schools, published words, exhibitions represent without any doubt an absolutely beneficial aspect for the normal and coherent functioning of the Romanian nation and for the construction of a consistent collective memory! [...] I believe the Romanian nation is incomplete and infirm without the memory of the victims of the Communist regime. This infirmity can be fixed through constructions such as the Sighet Memorial Museum!'

Under the same umbrella of museography, Mr. Nistor feels the need to express his view on the recent debates about the development of a museum dedicated to the history of the Communist regime in the capital city. The focus of this new project in his perception is suggested by his choice of concepts such as 'horrors' and 'atrocities'. His strong support for this museal initiative is expressed through words such as 'hope' and 'absolutely necessary', and through a sustained imperative tone. To add strength and dramatism to his argument, Mr. Nistor reiterates the lack of societal knowledge about the magnitude of Communist repression by narrating a discussion he had with a former member of the Communist apparatus:

'I hope the new museum of Communist horrors will be developed! I remember talking to a lady who had been in the second layer of the Communist nomenclature. I was telling

her about the atrocities which happened during the Communist regime, and she just could not believe my words. She was not being fake, her attitude was real! She really could not believe such things happened! She could not be persuaded no matter how many arguments I brought into the discussion. This is why such a museum is absolutely necessary!'

Mr. Nistor brings the transformational theme in the discussion once again when detailing his perception of the 1989 Revolution. He speaks of an ontological societal transformation brought about by the replacement of a totalitarian with a democratic regime. To add meaning and dramatism to the narrative, he adjoins the idea of a functional democratic system to the interest-driven corrupt nature of the contemporary political class:

'I lived the 1989 Revolution with enthusiasm, just like any normal and rational Romanian. From many perspectives, today's Romania is what I had hoped for. With all its flaws, the democratic system we have in place is functional. Of course, many of us hoped we would obtain certain things much faster than we did in reality. For not having achieved more, the political class bears the greatest responsibility. Then, we also have the conservative and limited nature of our society. But, ultimately, it was the political class which took advantage of the limits of the civil society for their own interests and did not manage to maintain the societal progress.'

- **Portrait Number 16: Mrs. Lucia Hossu-Longin**

Relevance to Study: Producer of the ‘Memorial of Suffering’ TV series (120 episodes).

Mrs. Hossu-Longin begins her meaning-making process on the investigated topic by narrating personal and familial aspects of her life under the Communist regime. She feels the need to mention the existence of a former political prisoner among her close family members. A feeling of inescapable hopelessness is expressed in words such as ‘forced’, ‘no way to resign’, and ‘burying myself’. The narrative contrast between her perception of life before and after the 1989 Revolution reveals the ontological transformation brought about by the change of regime. This is reinforced by the fact that the 1989 Revolution enabled her to produce the ‘Memorial of Suffering’ TV series which represents the existential and narrative core of her sense and decision-making processes:

‘My uncle was imprisoned in Aiud, but he refused to speak about this. Back then, those disclosing the suffering in prison risked being imprisoned again. [...] I was forced to join to Communist Party in 1967. I was never interested in politics, so I resigned from a Party newspaper called >>The Spark of Youth<<. I was called in front of a committee and told there is no way to resign the press of the Party. I was burying myself in an insipid centralized press. [...] I managed to fulfill my vocation as a journalist after 1989. I was 48, and it was already late. I did it so passionately that I am happy it happened even at a later stage of my life.’

The fact that almost the entire sense-making process revolves around the ‘Memorial of Suffering’ project exposes it as an existential leitmotif. Mrs. Hossu-

Longin's narrative link between the ability 'to do free press from 1990' and the beginning of her work on the 'Memorial of Suffering' reconfirms the ontological transformation brought to her life by the 1989 Revolution. Her perception of the Communist regime is expressed in words such as 'repression' and 'tortured'. The biblical analogy between Communism and Hell exposes a Christian side of her attribution of meaning. She associates the fall of the Communist regime to the freedom of accessing information about familial and national suppression. To make sense of this aspect, Mrs. Hossu-Longin introduces a major theme: the assumption of responsibility for initiatives aimed at popularizing the history of the Communist repression. This is expressed through an imperative remark: 'I took upon myself the difficult mission of being a guide through Hell!' The association of 'mission' and 'Hell' exposes her perception of this assumption of responsibility as an answer to a divine call:

'The beginnings of the >>Memorial of Suffering<< series were dramatic. My generation was able to do free press from 1990. Before, I was producing theater and movies for the national TV station. One day I was informed a crew from Switzerland was visiting Romania and shooting a material about the political detention under the Communist regime. I was asked to join them for a week during which I had a chance to speak to former political prisoners. In that context, I found out that a close family member of mine had also been politically detained. That is when I also found out the magnitude of the repression, how people had been tortured. So, I took upon myself the difficult mission of being a guide through Hell! During that trip, I started believing that I can also make some movies on this topic. Initially, I made six episodes, and the TV station said it is enough. Then I made 12 more, and this is how the series started.'

Mrs. Hossu-Longin continues making sense of the beginnings of the ‘Memorial of Suffering’ series by disclosing inner reasons which triggered her decision to initiate this project. Statements such as ‘was meeting a type of people I had never met or heard of before’, ‘always blamed myself for living for so many years without knowing’, ‘[h]ow come I have not known’, and ‘[t]his history had been hidden from us’ reconfirm the aforementioned ontological transformation by depicting the perceived freedom to access information the 1989 Revolution brought. This ontological transformation is suggested through the metaphor comparing the liberalization of information to a ‘flinch of conscience’. The nature of the Communist regime in Mrs. Hossu-Longin’s perception is further portrayed through words such as ‘wrath’, ‘repression’, ‘filled-up prisons’, ‘died in prison’, and ‘suffering’. The contrast between this perceived nature of the Communist regime and the realm of the former political prisoners – characterized by words such as ‘kindness’, ‘humanity’, ‘verticality’, ‘loyalty’, and ‘dissidents’ – adds strength and meaning to her sense-making. Dramatism is achieved through the remark about a majority of the survivors having already passed away meanwhile. Another way of attributing meaning to this aspect is by bringing back the theme of personal assumption of responsibility for popularizing the history of Communist repression, as suggested by the statement ‘I have a duty to these people’ and by the reference to the 80,000 minutes of recorded testimonies they have gained from interviews. Words such as ‘love’ and ‘care a lot’ combined with exclamatory statements and rhetorical questions reveal her emotional involvement in the topic, while concepts such as ‘saints’ and ‘blessing’ expose the Christian nature of the meaning and decision-making processes:

'I love this persecuted world in the sense that the wrath of those years turned some people into saints! Each interview for the >>Memorial of Suffering<< was a blessing for me. I was meeting a type of people I had never met or heard of before, characterized by kindness, humanity, verticality, and loyalty. I care a lot about these people, and I always blamed myself for living for so many years without knowing the prisons were full of political prisoners. I was impressed! I was face to face with people who suffered for this nation and chose to be imprisoned rather than giving up their beliefs. I was wondering where this world and people were. This history had been hidden from us in school, as we were only educated about Soviet heroes. I was more than 35 years old at the time. How come I have not known about the magnitude of the repression, about the dissidents, about the filled-up prisons?! I had a flinch of conscience! From this flinch the >>Memorial of Suffering<< was born, as I realized I have a duty to these people. I was thinking about all those people who died in the prisons and that no one would recover their suffering. We have over 80,000 minutes of recorded testimonies! Many of those I interviewed have passed away.'

In the same line, Mrs. Hossu-Longin continues making sense of the investigated topic by delving deeper into the inner experiential pool of working on the 'Memorial of Suffering' project. The perceived nature of the victims of the Communist repression is expressed through her emotional statement 'I am feeling like a worm in front of those people', and by declaring her disbelief in the possibility of another generation of such 'extraordinary people' to be born again. She attributes further meaning to this aspect by contrasting the profile of sacrifice and value-driven former political prisoners to that of present-day interest-driven generations. She makes further sense of this facet by

introducing another important theme to the narrative: the transformational-educational role of coming in contact with the former political prisoners' life stories. This is expressed through labels such as 'real moral points of reference and role models'. The perceived emotional impact of interviewing survivors of the Communist repression is declared through intimate details such as waking up with nightmares because of her 'soul' being 'so full of pain'. Mrs. Hossu-Longin acknowledges the ontological transformation brought to her life by the encounters with former political prisoners as part of her work on the 'Memorial of Suffering' when stating that: 'I kept these stories in my soul and they gave me the strength to continue being a guide through this Hell'. Beyond the metaphorical reference to 'being a guide through this Hell', she openly declares her work on the TV series as a lifelong answer to a vocational call: 'I will never give up my mission'. The narrative connection between the hardships encountered during her 'mission' to be a 'guide through this Hell' and the fate of those who chose prison and suffering over giving up their anti-Communist resistance and values exposes a perceived continuation of their struggle through her memorial work. The repeated use of concepts such as 'soul' and 'God' reconfirms the perception of her 'mission' as a response to a divine call. Another theme brought into discussion for attributing meaning to the investigated topic is that of a perceived international betrayal. She employs dark humor and sarcasm – the political prisoners 'waiting for the sky to turn black with American warplanes' and ending up being executed at the Jilava Prison – to subtly hint at the meeting between Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin at Yalta in 1945 when the spheres of influence in Europe were redrawn which led to the Russian-backed Communist regime reaching power in Romania:

'I remember one sound engineer from my team telling me one day: >>I cannot work on the series anymore. I am feeling like a worm in front of these people. I cannot listen to their stories anymore. Compared to their life stories, what have we done?!<< The elite of students back then chose to take to the mountains and fight against Communism at any cost. Nowadays, we complain about losing a job or a benefit, while the politicians swap sides according to who pays more. I do not know when a generation like the interwar generation will be born again. For that generation, I made the >>Memorial of Suffering<< series. They are real moral points of reference and role models. People who spend 10, 15, 17 years in prison, who lost their youth, some never started families after being released. I keep going on for these extraordinary people! Sometimes my soul was so full of pain that I woke up with nightmares based on the stories I had heard. Their stories of suffering enter your soul, and you ask yourself: >>How, in God's name, have these people managed to endure such treatment?<< I kept these stories in my soul, and they gave me the strength to continue being a guide through this Hell. I will never give up my mission no matter on the hardships I encounter. In my opinion, the >>Memorial of Suffering<< should have been a source of history and memory on the national television. However, there were never more than three people working on it, unlike other TV shows which have 30 or more staff members. All of us who worked on this series loved the idea of freedom and dignity even when the institution we worked for tried to chain us. We must remember that our nation had the strongest anti-Communist resistance in Europe. For a decade, the partisans in the mountains kept the fight on waiting for the sky to turn black with American warplanes. The sky never turned black, and the partisans were executed by the walls of the Jilava Prison.'

As her meaning-making process unfolds, Mrs. Hossu-Longin feels the need to thoroughly detail the environment surrounding the airing of the first episodes of the 'Memorial of Suffering' series on the national TV channel. In so doing, she reconfirms the ontological transformation brought by the 1989 Revolution on individual and societal levels. To attribute meaning to this aspect, she introduces another major theme of her sense-making process: the persistence of individual, practices, and values from the Communist regime in the post-1989 Romanian society. She makes sense of this aspect by pinpointing former cadres of the Communist repressive apparatus among the censoring managerial staff at the national television station. Adding to this is the repeated mentioning of Ion Iliescu - the first president of Romania after the 1989 Revolution, previously in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Romania – as the protector of these censoring authorities. Such a speech reveals a personality which places freedom of expression at its core, as suggested by the metaphor 'pedestal of freedom'. Words such as 'indoctrinated', 'dangerous', 'propaganda', 'control' and recurrent references to censoring attempts of her work on the 'Memorial of Suffering' expose her perception of the living environment in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 Revolution on personal, institutional, and societal levels. Against this, two statements express the previously mentioned ontological transformation brought about by the change of regime in 1989: 'Any time they tried to stop or censor me, I went to the press. I took full advantage of the freedom the 1989 Revolution brought to our lives.' Through the filter of Christianity, Mrs. Hossu-Longin's repeated – direct and indirect - references to freedom are presumed to hold deeper meanings since Freedom is both the fundamental driving force and ultimate life goal for Christian believers. The emphasis on censoring attempts

of topics linked to Iuliu Maniu and the King of Romania adds identitarian meaning to the narrative, considering the former is one of the most important Romanian politicians with a decisive role in the reunification of Romania in 1918 while the latter is the representative of the monarchic years which saw the strongest development of the nation in modern history. Mrs. Hossu-Longin feels the need to stress the fact that she was the first one to open the former Sighet Prison. Considering the topic of investigation, this reference suggests an identitarian personal connection with the Sighet Memorial Museum and its history:

'The first episode of the >>Memorial of Suffering<< aired on the national television on 14th August 1991. A colleague told me the next day: >>Last night my neighbors kept knocking on my door asking what this TV show was about and whether it was an illegal channel.<< Other reactions I was receiving were in the line of >>can you get over these dead people?!<< As if the dead people were the result of my work and not the result of the society we were leaving behind! The national TV station was still indoctrinated, although it had already proclaimed itself as free. The characters in my movies were anti-Communist. They were talking against the regime and kept saying Romania had not detached itself from Communism, which was a dangerous thing to say in the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution. Back then, among those working for the national TV station were people who had been part of the Communist repressive mechanism. Some had even hunted down members of the anti-Communist resistance. There were wives of generals whose husbands had opened fire on the protesters during the 1989 Revolution. One of these wives employed at the national TV station was in charge of the entire archive of the Communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. I realized the main institutions for propaganda

were stuffed with people they could control. Some heads of departments had caused the imprisonment of people. I knew such people would not give me their blessings to start working on the >>Memorial of Suffering<<, but I started it anyway! Any time they tried to stop or censor me, I went to the press. I took full advantage of the freedom the 1989 Revolution brought to our lives. I have always been crazy about freedom! I reacted at any attempt to hit me or the series! At first, some wanted to view my episodes and cut some sections out. In one episode, Alexandru Drăghici – the former Minister of Internal Affairs – said: >>I am not afraid as long as Iliescu is in power!<<. They asked me to take out the name of Ion Iliescu. After 1989, I promised myself I would never censor any part of my work! This way I built the pedestal of my freedom to now allow any cuts or censoring attempts. I remember going to the former Sighet Prison. I was the first one to open it, and it was full of trampled copies of the official newspaper of the Communist Party. A member of the Romanian Parliament asked me: >>Why are you going to film a movie about Iuliu Maniu? His party is not in power!<<. Back then, it was also not allowed to mention the name of the King of Romania. Piece by piece, image by image, I built this freedom for myself. Later, they could not do anything to me because of the popularity of the series.’

Mrs. Hossu-Longin continues making sense of the investigated topic by strengthening the theme of continuity of the Communist regime into the post-1989 Romanian society. She does this by narrating lived attempts at societal manipulation by groups interested in maintaining the regime while only changing the leader. Her strong emotional involvement in this aspect is expressed in the imperative statement ‘those children died in the streets for an anti-Communist revolution’:

'At the Revolution in 1989, I was at work in Studio 4 of the national TV station. What I lived in those days is different from the officially presented version of events. I kept a suitcase of documents. The messages issued to the Romanian nation were developed and corrected in an office on the 11th floor, then sent to Studio 4. After reading them, the announcer threw them in the bin. In front of everyone, I picked them up. They tell the story of those days. For example, the word >>anti-Communist<< was crossed from the announcements and replaced with >>anti-totalitarian<< or >>anti-Ceaușescu<<. What they hoped to achieve was an anti-Ceaușescu revolution, not a change of system. But those children died in the streets for an anti-Communist revolution, not only to replace Ceaușescu!'

In another instance, Mrs. Hossu-Longin feels the need to add extra elements to the perceived transformational role of meeting victims of the Communist repression. She does this by providing a detailed and intimate depiction of the inner changes caused by the interaction with former political prisoners during the interviews for the 'Memorial of Suffering' series. She emphasizes the emotional hardships and struggles caused by a sustained and compassionate interaction with stories of suffering and repression. She expresses this in words such as 'painful', 'very austere life', 'exceptionally difficult', and 'I had become a physical wreck, I had grown old, I was finished'. Against this, she contrasts a strength and willingness to continue which she associates to metaphysical reasons, as expressed in statements such as 'I was driven by a valiance and will stronger than my mental and emotional means' and 'I felt a communication with those in the afterworld who were asking me not to stop.' Through the filter of Christianity previously discussed, it can be critically assumed these metaphysical reasons represent a perceived

answer to a divine call. To make further sense of this aspect, she feels the need to mention the importance of national and international support and recognition for continuing the work on the ‘Memorial of Suffering’ project. Her emotional involvement in the topic is expressed through a mix of exclamatory remarks, rhetorical questions, and intimate subjective experiential perceptions:

‘I was driven by a valiance and will stronger than my mental and emotional means. Had I stopped the series it would have been a tragedy! I was receiving thousands of letters. How could I have wallowed in self-pity or listen to my heart and discontinue the series?! I could not have done this! Of course, it was painful! All I was doing was reading memorial literature and journals of imprisonment, and watching video cassettes. My living horizon had narrowed, that is all I was doing. I was going to the consecration of memorial crosses in former prisons. I was living a very austere life. This was my way of preparing myself emotionally. I could not allow myself any other joy. My own children could not spend time with me because I was completely dedicated to the >>Memorial of Suffering<< project. I was imagining those who died in the prisons thinking that no one would ever dig out the details of their deaths. And here I was, doing it! I felt a communication with those in the afterworld who were asking me not to stop. And I did not stop! It has been exceptionally difficult! After 15 years I realized I had become a physical wreck, I had grown old, I was finished! At the same time, the love I was receiving from the former political prisoners and from the audience gave me the power to continue. A drop of gratitude helps a lot. And I received plenty from the former political prisoners. They sent me letters, messages, they accepted me as an honorary member of their association. Plus, the series received uncountable awards. Both the Library of the US

National Congress and the Hoover Institute purchased the TV series. Sometimes when I realize the archive we have gathered I start crying and ask myself >>How could I resist? How could I interview all these people?<<'

Another important theme in Mrs. Hossu-Longin's meaning-making process is justice. One way of attributing meaning to this theme is by placing it in the context of the recent sentencing of former prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. Her perception of such acts of judging or condemning the Communist ideology and perpetrators is expressed in words such as 'smokescreen', 'farce', and 'not seriously achieved'. To this, she contrasts the symbolical educational importance of sentencing those who abused others towards the popularization of the history of Communist repression and towards achieving an individual and collective process of atonement. This is expressed in words such as 'mea culpa', 'penitence', 'contrition', 'shame', and 'admit their actions' which she associates to a Christian approach to achieving justice. Through the filter of Christianity, such a focus on justice can be critically assumed to hold deeper meanings considering Justice is a fundamental pillar of Christianity according to which the soul of the deceased may be allowed passage into the Heavens based on his or her earthly deeds and willingness for atonement. The contrast between this proposed Christian approach and Mrs. Hossu-Longin's perception of the nature of the Communist regime – expressed through concepts such as 'suffering in the prisons', 'horror of Communism', 'severity of maltreatment', 'criminal nature', and 'subhuman' – adds strength and dramatism to her meaning-making process. Further dramatism is added through the imperative repetition of 'none' in regard to the number of

perpetrators who have admitted their actions. Her emotional involvement is seen from the high frequency of exclamatory remarks:

'The sentencing of Vişinescu is a smokescreen! Just like President Bănescu's gesture of condemning Communism was a farce aimed at pleasing Europe! Communism has never been condemned in Romania! There was a trial, one more will come. Justice will not be seriously achieved. I have repeatedly said we should not use the same measures the Communist used of imprisoning senior citizens. On the other hand, such trials are necessary for people to find out what happened, and for the perpetrators to admit their actions. A process of mea culpa, of penitence, is needed! I do not wish to see Vişinescu in prison, but the trial is needed for the public to hear about the suffering in the prisons. Even if he spends a few months behind bars, it is important for him to hear the sound of the prison door closing from the inside. The horror of Communism was so great that it cannot be correctly judged in tribunals. They cannot tell me they were only following the regulations! These regulations included indications for maltreatment, but the severity of this maltreatment was a personal decision of the perpetrators rotted in their criminal nature. Nowadays they are old men, they have heirs, grandsons, they are ashamed to admit what they did. Contrition and shame are needed, they are Christian feelings! Admitting you did wrong to this country does not cost anything! No judicial act or prison sentence can achieve this. Maybe one day these people will wake up and realized they acted in a subhuman way. By now, none of them admitted what they did. None!'

Another way Mrs. Hossu-Longin attributes meaning to the theme of justice is by placing in the context of her own work on the 'Memorial of Justice' series when she

interviewed the head of the Communist secret police, Alexandru Nicolschi. The repetition of 'truth' reinforces her perception of the importance of symbolic condemnation of abuse and repression. For a Christian believer like Mrs. Hossu-Longin the repetition of this word is assumed to hold deeper meanings since Truth is one of the fundamental values promoted by Christianity:

'When I went to interview Alexandru Nicolschi, he was surprised I did not bring the police and prosecutor. I only went with the cameraman. We did not go to harm him, only to know his version of the truth. I wanted to see if he admits committing terrible abuses. After my interview, the district attorney wanted to question him. The next day he was dead. I do not know whether they killed him, or he died of natural causes. Then the district attorney asked me: >>are you not worried these people are dying because of you?<< I told him: >>can someone die from telling the truth?<<'

Having detailed her perception about the transformational role of coming in contact with the history of Communist repression on personal and societal levels, Mrs. Hossu-Longin feels the need to also target this perception to the young generations of Romanians. In so doing, she brings back in the discussion the theme of personal assumption of responsibility for getting involved in projects aimed at popularizing the history and values of the victims of the Communist regime among youngsters. For her, the emphasis is on the preventive and identity-strengthening potential of memorial initiatives such as the 'Memorial of Suffering' series and the Sighet Memorial Museum. This potential is expressed through statements such as '[h]istory repeats itself', 'it is important for young people to know their roots', and '[i]t is our real history, after 50 years

of lies and numbing of national consciousness.’ The narrative connection between these two projects reveals a perceived symbolic link between them based on shared roots, function, and values. Mrs. Hossu-Longin makes further sense of the Sighet Memorial Museum by speaking against its inclusion on dark tourism itineraries. Adding extra meaning to the narrative is a perceived contrast between such touristic initiatives and the memorial and commemorative roles of the Sighet Memorial Museum. The label ‘sacred place for remembrance’ attaches a metaphysical perspective to this institution given by its sustained ability to encourage and enable visitors to remember the victims of the Communist regime and the values they believed in:

‘Present and future generations do not know the level of suffering this country has been through. It is important for me to educate the young generations of Romanians. For this reason, I speak to high-school and university students whenever I am invited. The youngsters are interested in the >>Memorial of Suffering<<. History repeats itself. Even if it does not, it is important for young people to know their roots, to know they are not successors of cowards, but of brave men. I was recently attending an event where a young lady came to me and said: >>For me, you represent our youth. Your movies have shaped us.<< I hope the >>Memorial of Suffering<< triggers the instinct to know more. School history books do not help them much, as they only contain brief information on the history after 1918. [...] I do not agree with the >>dark tourism<< concept and, especially, with the inclusion of the Sighet Memorial Museum on such touristic routes. The Sighet Memorial is a sacred place for remembrance. It is our real history, after 50 years of lies and numbing of national consciousness.’

- **Portrait Number 17: Mrs. Ioana Hașu**

Relevance to Study: Journalist for Radio France Internationale. Researcher of the Securitate Archives. Organizer of workshops and conferences on the anti-Communist resistance.

Upon hearing the topic of investigation, Mrs. Hașu begins her sense-making process by narrating intimate childhood memories. She shares the memory of growing up with parents who greatly enjoyed reading, and could only obtain books through illegal trafficking. Detailing this aspect from the beginning of her meaning-making reveals her and her family's keen interest in intellectual activities. By contrast, the anecdotal stories of illegal trafficking of good books and reading in secrecy depict the repressive nature of the Communist regime in Mrs. Hașu's perception. The serene and cheerful tone Mrs. Hașu uses to narrate such stories reveals no resentment for those who repressed her family:

I grew up in a normal family. My parents were working in factories or construction sites. Not the intellectual cream of society, but people who read a lot. I grew up surrounded by books. One childhood memory which stuck in my mind is the illegal trafficking of good books. They had connections not with the butcher, but with the bookstore. They would sometimes offer the bookstore staff certain attentions – we would nowadays call this bribery – to secretly keep any good books for them. Any good book always came in a package with 6-7 propaganda books. My mum made special covers for them and lent them to friends in a type of a secretive network. I remember one time my parents got a very

good book but only for one night. So, they split it, each read one half, and the next day he or she summarized it to the other to get the whole story.'

Another private childhood memory she mentions is that of secretly listening to Radio Free Europe. Although not accusing anyone, Mrs. Hașu's story reveals the omnipresent fear, mistrust, and paranoia characterizing the Romanian society during the Communist regime. The mentioning of Radio Free Europe adds symbolic strength to the narrative as it is generally known among Romanians that this radio station was the only connection to the outside world during those times. Considering her chosen profession as a radio journalist, it can be critically assumed that such childhood events have had an ontological transformational role in her subsequent life choices and attribution of meaning:

'We listened to Radio Free Europe in the back room of our house, with all the doors safely locked, and our parents always told us to not disclose this to anyone. My parents did not tell us much against the regime, although they both suffered because of it.'

Childhood memories become one of primary means in Mrs. Hașu's attribution of meaning in both their frequency and amount of detail. Another childhood memory she feels the need to detail is that of kindergarten issues caused by her grandmother's anti-Communist attitude. Sarcasm is a strong expressive tool she uses throughout the interview. For example, when enumerating the typical symbols of Communist regimes, when repeating Beloved Leader in a derogatory tone, and when he refers to the wife of the last Communist leader as 'his all too wonderful wife'. She openly acknowledges the strong impact the memories of her grandma calling Communists 'bastards' and poems

about the Communist leader ‘propagandist junk’ have had on the development of her personality. This anecdotal story also reveals the roots of a personality which was taught to follow Truth even if it means having to overcome hardships:

‘One of my grandmas had a much more open anti-Communist attitude. I remember in kindergarten – among the usual displays of the tractors, Beloved Leader, working fields, and patriotic songs – I had to recite a poem about the Beloved Leader and his all too wonderful wife. I recited this poem at home, and my grandma had a rather violent reaction when saying >>the bastards, they are brainwashing our children and destroying them from an early age<<. The next day in class I refused to recite this poem. So, they made a commission to deal with this, my parents were called up to the school and warned in a firm tone that I would be expelled if I still refused to recite the poem. My parents got scared and had arguments with my grandma because of this. The next day, I still refused to recite it, so they forced me to learn by heart a much longer one. My grandma said I should learn the long one rather than that propagandist junk. This is a powerful memory related to values I grew up in during the first part of my childhood.’

Except for instances of anti-Communist familial opposition, Mrs. Hașu also shares childhood memories linked to an Orthodox upbringing which she perceives not as a dogmatic obligation, but as a natural aspect of life. Her mentioning of this aspect critically reveals this spiritual element as an essential pillar in her attribution of meaning:

‘I have been going to Church ever since I can remember. I have never had what we can call a >>conversion<< into Orthodoxy. My grandma always went to Church and took us with her. Every evening she prayed, and we could hear her. She never asked us to pray

along, but through her influence, we learned different prayers. She did it naturally, not to demonstrate something to someone. She did not need to speak about this; it was not theology but a natural part of life. Parents did this rarely. We had no icons displayed, but we had some prayer books and a Bible in the house. I never saw them go to Church, but they were not opposed to it either.'

In the same line, she shares childhood memories linked to her close family's behavior during the Revolution in 1989. Depicted images of her parents actively taking part in the revolution and her grandma crying with happiness at the fall of the Communist regime reveal Mrs. Haşu perceives them as having had a strong influence on her personality. Considering she has later become a researcher in the archive of the former secret police and an organizer of workshops and conferences on the Communist repression, her words expose the ontological transformation brought by the 1989 Revolution to her life:

'When the Revolution happened – we were 11 or 12 – we had been taught nothing about the family history. I did not know absolutely anything at that point about our grandparents, about the fight, the resistance. During the Revolution, my parents locked us in the house and went to support the movement at any costs. I remember my grandma started to cry with joy when they announced the fall of the regime.'

Under the same umbrella of her formative early years, Mrs. Haşu narrates in detail her intimate familial drama under the Communist regime. Instances of active armed anti-Communist resistance among her close family members are intermingled with stories of their subsequent death or arrest. The result is a dramatic narrative portrayal whose level

of emotion reaches its peak when she mentions that approximately 16 close family members were either executed or imprisoned. Despite the high emotional loading of her story, her tone remains calm and non-judgemental. This can be critically assumed to be linked to her upbringing in the spirit of compassionate Orthodox values. Considering also most of her relatives were Christian believers, their choice of armed resistance and also Mrs. Hașu's Truth and Freedom-driven historical initiatives can be seen to symbolically resemble Christ's sacrificial carrying of the Cross to the place of His own Crucifixion:

'I think it was only around 1995 that I heard something really vague about one of my grandparents having opposed the Communist regime, but nothing too precise. I found out that he had been executed only towards the end of my teenage years. [...] The strongest and most well-known story is about my grandfather, my father's father. He was one of the partisans fighting against the Communists in the Făgăraș Mountains together with his brother. They joined the Resistance from the beginning; his brother actually initiated the idea of starting a resistance movement in the mountains. In fact, he was the first leader of the resistance group until he was killed and Gavrilă Ogoranu took over. My grandfather was also killed. Andrei Hașu died in a confrontation with the Securitate. Gheorghe Hașu – my grandfather – was executed at the Jilava Prison in 1957 together with the last members of the group - except for Ogoranu - following a staged trial. On my mother's side, her father was also imprisoned for seven years. Only a few years ago I found out that my grandfather on my mum's side was arrested because he gave shelter to my grandfather on my dad's side in times when the two families were not connected by any ties and in a context where they were not living in neighboring villages! So, my mom's father gave active support to the resistance in the mountains: shelter, food, information,

clothes. He died soon after his release precisely because of the callous prison treatment and conditions in the early 1950s. I cannot remember the exact number, but something around 16 close family members were arrested during those times. Some were executed, some were sentenced for life, but many died short after being released after years in prison.'

In her meaning-making process, this initial major theme of childhood memories of resistance and repression is closely connected to another major theme: Mrs. Haşu's ontological transformation. At different moments throughout the interview, she speaks of her transformation within and through her family's confrontation of and reconciliation with the past. This transitional change can be seen her choice of verbs: 'intrigued', 'annoyed', 'not find', 'unable to speak', 'have not done', 'suppress', 'deny' are replaced in her narrative by 'opening up', 'facing', 'assuming', 'healing', 'mourning', 'remember', and 'cry'. Her emphasis is on a spiritual process of facing and coming to peace with dormant memories of familial suffering which she metaphorically calls unhealed wounds. This spiritual focus is evident in her mentioning of mourning, considering she has already spoken of having been educated in a religious environment. For Orthodox Christians, mourning is linked to the experiential aspect of Death. It holds strong archaic symbols and involves a complex process of rituals whose function is twofold: to support the smooth passing of the deceased's soul into the afterlife and to help the living accept and heal from this event. Thus, her reference to the action of mourning adds strong metaphysical meanings to the narrative:

'I then started asking at home, and I could not find out too much. This intrigued and annoyed me at the same time because I felt they are hiding things from me. Much later I realized they were unable to speak about this because they have not done it for about 40 years and it was very tough to suddenly come across a wound which had not yet healed. [...] Slowly, my parents started opening up to the topic. Later I realized that for my parents talking about this became a way of facing and assuming the past. I identified this identical behavioral model in other families over time. This process involves much suffering and leads to a familial process of healing through the assumption of suffering, even through a period of late mourning - a period when you allow yourself to remember, to cry, to face all these happenings which you had been forced to suppress and deny for decades. You could not speak about such things even in the privacy of your own home because they had installed microphones.'

Mrs. Haşu goes on to acknowledge a sustained personal growth gained from the interaction with former political prisoners and members of the resistance, which she directly connects to her strong emotional involvement rooted in her familial dramas. This strongly perceived bond is visible from words such as 'deeply embedded', 'highly present', 'humane connections', and 'friendships', while the assumed ontological transformations are expressed through statement such as 'I have grown', 'encounters which transformed us', and 'the information [...] became part of my experience'. The added temporal dimension of this interaction – 15 years – adds extra strength to the narrative. Mrs. Haşu's emphasis is on a spiritual growth stemming from a deeply felt compassion as suggested by her emphasis on 'humane connections'. This compassion manifested in her active participation in their process of healing through remembrance,

and assumption of their memories in her own set of experiential values. For an assumed Christian such as Mrs. Haşu, such an attitude critically reveals deep metaphysical meanings, since Love and Compassion are the main values promoted in Orthodox Christian teachings. Remarks on finding her family photos and her grandfather's signature in the archives of the Communist secret police add palpable dramatism to her meaning-making process. Again, this is presumed to trigger strong emotions within Mrs. Haşu since Family is one of the fundamental pillars for Christian believers. The portrait of Mrs. Haşu coming across familial items during her work as a researcher in the archives of the secret police critically reconfirms the ontological transformation brought to her life by the interaction with the universe of the political prisoners and members of the resistance. This connection between the perceived personal and professional growth is openly acknowledged in a different point of the interview, as seen below:

'They have been so deeply embedded and so present in everything I have done that I cannot imagine how else it could have been. What I can say is that I have grown through and with them. I was a child when I came across this topic. There are 15 crucial years where all these aspects have been highly present in my life. I formed not professional, but humane connections with people who were involved in the resistance. Friendships are part of you, and you take them with you wherever you go. All the meetings and dialogues with them were not simple exchanges of information, but encounters which transformed us all. I have actively participated in their process of commemoration, remembrance, healing, by resonating with and being present in their suffering as you would with anyone who is close to you. And, in turn, all the information I have obtained and processed became part of my experience because they are related to my family. [...] It is hard for

me to differentiate between my position which involves a strong personal involvement and what would have been had this personal connection not existed. Reading archives is not the same with touching the signature of a grandfather you have never met. It is also not the same as seeing confiscated family photos in the archives for the first time. In a political folder, you find photos which should normally be in a family album. I cannot express in words what you feel in those moments! [...] It is a very complex process which encouraged and enabled me to obtain a certification as a researcher in the Securitate archives, to enroll in a postgraduate course in History, to publish diverse articles on this theme, to organize workshops and exhibitions for children, and so on.'

Another aspect of personal growth she feels the need to detail is that of a personal assumption of responsibility for projects aimed at popularizing the victims of the Communist regime and the topic of anti-Communist resistance in Romania. She links this aspect to former frustrations with the public authorities and expresses it by including a long series of rhetorical questions and irony. In so doing, she also manages to portray certain aspects of the post-1989 Romanian society focused on the scarcity of available information and projects on the history of the Communist regime. Her firm belief in the personal assumption of responsibility for initiating such initiatives and for fixing societal flaws is expressed through a series of questions addressed to herself and through the repetition of 'responsibility' and its derivatives:

'Having found out this history of my family, I lived with certain frustrations towards the authorities and what they were doing on this topic. But then I started asking myself: >>how come this history is not known on a general scale?! How come no one writes

about this?! How come we do not hear about these stories?! How come this history is not in the school books?! Why do the children not learn about this in school?! How come the authorities do not have a clue about what happened in a very recent past in the areas of the country they are managing?! How come this is of no interest to any government officials?! Why do we not have monuments dedicated to them?! Why, why, why?!<<. But I stopped asking these questions when I realized I can only ask them to myself. OK, these things have not been done. But what can I do? What have I done? Did I write anything? Did I teach any children? Have I initiated any projects about this? I realized I did absolutely nothing and that I can consume much energy trying to criticize what all the others have not done. And that I can use this energy to actually do something. Many may ask >>what scale can you do something on?<< or >>do you think you will solve anything by doing something?<< I believe in the beautiful snowballing process started on a micro level. And I also believe in the personal assumption of responsibility. I really believe all of us are responsible for what all of us have not done. I am responsible for what the others have not done.'

Her strong belief in the individual assumption of responsibility for changing societal flaws is evident in an instance when she is bluntly and imperatively criticizing those who prefer judging others rather than changing something themselves:

'We like criticizing too much, but that is all we do! Much energy has been spent criticizing the lack or poor quality of institutions, research materials, school curriculum and so on, but no one does anything to improve this! We do not live in the sphere of personal assumption of responsibility! Many believe they can see what others have not done well

and that they are smart enough to reason why things are not done well. However, when it comes to actually doing something about it or to working in teams to solve some issues...that's a different story!'

Having already stated her firm belief in the personal assumption of responsibility for initiatives aimed at popularizing the topics of Communist crimes and anti-Communist resistance in a society where they remain almost taboo, Mrs. Hașu introduces other identified work and research-related issues and gaps which persuaded her to get actively involved. Considering her own familial history, the mention of children who are unaware of their recent familial history reveals an identitarian component of her decision. Also, the strong statement against the censorship of sensitive topics reveals a sense-making process where freedom of expression holds a central role. This is presumed to hold deeper meanings for Mrs. Hașu considering Truth and Freedom are supposed to be the fundamental driving forces and life goals for Orthodox Christians:

'I could not find any book that would explain what the resistance in the mountains really was. Even nowadays it is hard to find a good synthesis of this topic! [...] I decided to set up workshops for children because I realized the scarcity of people who work with young people on this topic. [...] These were kids from the Făgăraș County who had not heard anything about the recent past of their grandparents and other relatives. [...] High-school professors complain of not having materials and expertise to teach this topic. [...] Sensitive topics should not be (self)censored, they should be investigated precisely because they are sensitive! [...] I believe competition in this field of activity is very stupid. It exists on all levels, also among researchers. [...] In such qualitative field of work, I do

not see what the problem is if both of us research the same topic. In Romania, this is even more stupid, as there are still so many un-researched themes and unread archive documents.'

A particular issue Mrs. Hașu emphasizes on is the poor functioning of the state archives. She does this by detailing her personal experience as a researcher and contrasting it to the perceived efficient functioning of the archives in a neighboring EU nation. She further makes sense of this aspect by openly speaking about deliberate attempts of the Romanian authorities to discourage those interested in researching the archives of the former Communist secret police. In so doing, she manages to add further details to the portrait of contemporary Romania previously sketched. Mrs. Hașu subtly introduces a theme which would eventually become one of the leitmotifs of the interview – the persistence of individuals, values, and practices of the former Communist regime in the post-1989 Romanian society:

'The framework and the atmosphere are still those of an institution which tries to cover up and defend the archives of the Securitate. It is hard to access the archives and even harder if you are not accredited as a researcher. The space they provide lacks everything, from natural light to privacy. The working hours completely overlaps the working hours of any normal being. [...] You can only access a limited number of files at the same time, you can only get these if you asked for them some time in advance, and some you just do not get access to at all. You cannot do photocopies and take photos of the documents. [...] For some time, it was clear the CNSAS was only meant to operate and exist as a formality. From that point, things just snowballed into this culture that is hard to get out of. Of

course, these are political decisions! It is unacceptable that you have to wait for six months only to find out if a file you requested actually exists! In Budapest, for example, it takes one or two days to get an access pass for any archive you may need, no need to mention the topic, no need for letters of recommendation, and so on. You are just a person who wants to see some files. You can go whenever you want, you can access how many files you want per day. From the moment you make the request, you receive the files in maximum five minutes, not in five months! You can photocopy anything you want anytime you want it, without having to report to anyone. You have access to laptops and other gadgets there compared to the Romanian archives.'

When talking about the Sighet Memorial, Mrs. Hașu mentions she visited it three times already. She also notes she is aware of the usual controversies and critiques and that she prefers to focus on its constructive memorial and educational functions, as reflected by her choice of words such as 'connecting', 'glad', 'positive meaning and functionality', and 'enabled':

'It is a place for connecting to and with Memory. This is why I am glad it exists, and I do not want to criticize it. I see its positive meaning and functionality. Tens of summer schools have been organized there. In times when no one else would touch upon this topic, this memorial enabled young people to come in contact with it.'

Regarding the interpretation on display at the Sighet Museum, she considers it informationally and emotionally well-balanced and comprehensive. She makes sense of this aspect by arguing against museographic initiatives whose purpose is to manipulate

and trigger emotion-driven reactions within visitors. This line of thought reconfirms Mrs. Hașu's balanced and compassionate personality:

'The armed resistance is one thing, the daily life in Communism is another, while the resistance through culture is yet another. What do you do with all these themes? What is the message or the discourse of the museum? How can one encompass all of these? I think it is imperative not to mix these aspects up – and Sighet is a good example for this – and to not be very violent in stuffing an already digested message down people's throat. I do not like museums where they stuff down your throat messages like >>these are the victims, let's praise them!<< or >>these are the aggressors, let's get them!<<. This is not what we need. Similarly, I do not think we need to enforce an emotional message upon people. The facts are already solid, highly loaded with emotion. Let's present them as they are, in their transparent fullness. [...] I can recall the trajectory and themes, and I believe they are well-marked.'

She also feels the need to emphasize the Memorial's *in situ* physical and metaphysical importance. Again, her focus is on the impact and transformational influence of such sites on young visitors. Her intense passion and emotional involvement in the topic are expressed through exclamatory remarks:

'The space is a memorial in itself, it is the prison where events happened, and which is energetically soaked in all the bad things which took place there. There is no way not to think about this while visiting the memorial. When being inside the cell where Maniu died...you are aware of this! [...] If you are a young person and the visit is your first point of contact with this side of history, you will be blown away!'

Also, at different moments in her meaning-making process, she reiterates the pioneering importance of the Sighet Memorial which she directly connects to the societal context it was developed in. She makes sense of this aspect by linking two themes she has already tackled before: the continuation of the former Communist regime in the post-1989 Romanian society, and the assumption of individual responsibility for developing projects in areas which the ruling authorities ignore. She also attributes meaning to this perceived importance of the Sighet Memorial by placing it in the context of recent societal discussions for the need of developing a Communism-focused museum in the capital city. While acknowledging the importance of the Sighet Memorial, she fully supports the development of further memorial institutions on the topic, as expressed in words such as ‘hope’ and ‘excite’ and in the exclamatory tone of her remarks:

I am happy it exists, but sad nothing similar exists in Bucharest. Recent discussions on this topic excite me! I hope such a museum will be developed in Bucharest and that it will only be the beginning! [...] I believe we must take into consideration one aspect upon criticizing: upon the development of the Sighet Memorial there was absolutely nothing like this in Romania. People had no experience or expertise in Communist museology. The access to foreign works on this topic was still rather restricted. It was not like filling up a void with this museum. There was absolutely nothing like this in the market! They did what they could do. [...] They did it with tremendous efforts. Anyone who ever organized anything in Romania knows how difficult organizing anything is. [...] Many people just criticize it for missing out on some things or for the emotional way the discourse is presented. Let's say we agree...but when was it realized? What was the emotional context of the society at those times? And, even more importantly, has any other

similar work been realized meanwhile which is perfectly balanced, critical, interdisciplinary, and documented?! No, absolutely no one did anything like this!

As seen, one major theme throughout Mrs. Hașu's sense-making in both the frequency of reference and the narrative details is the effects of the Communist regime on present-day Romania. One sub-theme she mentions is that of interest-driven political continuity of former active Communist cadres into the modern public system:

'Especially in the first years after the Revolution, there were high stakes, and those who had been in the system before were and are still in the system.'

She spends considerably more time and detail portraying her view on the psychological effects of Communism on the contemporary Romanian society. The repeated use of 'lost' and 'lack' in when referring to positive aspects of life such as smiling, trust, and natural relationships among people exposes the perceived nature of these effects, while the repetition of 'strong(er)', 'great', 'very inclined', 'ingrained', or 'whole' reveals their magnitude. She metaphorically refers to the effects of Communism on the contemporary society as 'disease', whose cure, in her view, lies in assuming personal responsibility for facing the past and changing its negative impacts on the present and future. Considering she began her meaning-making on the topic with childhood memories of secretly reading books and listening to radio stations for fear of informants and arrests, her reference to decades of being afraid to speak out influencing the present reveals a meaning-making process where childhood memories play a fundamental role:

'I believe they still influence us much stronger than we can possibly imagine on societal and relational levels. I believe we have lost greatly during the Communist years. [...] We

have lost the ability to relate to each other and smile. Foreign journalists came to Romania in the first years after the fall of Communism, and they were shocked at seeing the people not smiling. Nowadays it is a bit better, but we still suffer from this disease. Yes, we have stopped naturally relating to others! Yes, we have stopped smiling! Yes, we are very inclined toward whining and toward emphasizing what the others are not doing well! There is a strong lack of trust in the others, a duplicity in the relationship with the others. This comes from tens of years of being scared to say what we truly believed. This has become ingrained in the way we relate to each other. Whole organizational and institutional structures were formed on this basis. Only by knowing these aspects, we can assume and change them. I was not aware of them before, but now it all seems so clear!’

The fact that Mrs. Hașu spends a significant amount of time and energy throughout her meaning-making process detailing different psychological effects of Communist totalitarianism on the contemporary Romanian society reveals both a deep interest of this field and a thorough research in it. One sub-theme she brings into the discussion is that of the trauma and post-trauma effect. She makes sense of it by inputting examples from her community, by delving into the realm of neuroscience, and by calling for equal academic interest in the (post)traumatic effects of Nazi and Communist regimes. The depiction of a man crucified in the village center for everyone to see symbolically resembles the Biblical episode of Christ’s crucifixion. For firm Christian believers such as the Romanians, such an image is presumed to take a strong emotional toll. References to ‘decades’ and ‘all over the country’ reveal the perceived magnitude of the repression in time and space, and add dramatism to the narrative. Making sense of such aspects through the filter of neuroscience exposes an analytical personality driven not by negative residual

feelings, but by a desire to deeply understand facts and their societal implications. Mrs. Hașu's repetitive invitation to 'imagine' what others may have felt in sensitive historical moments reconfirms her compassionate nature:

'Then we have the trauma and the post-trauma effect which is ever-so-present in the Romanian society. It has been strongly investigated about the Holocaust, but almost untouched in relation to the Communist regimes. I believe this subject should be of great interest to all of us. This has no ideological implication; it involves traumas which happened in families and collectivities...collective traumas! In 1952, in a village in the Făgăraș County, one man was killed on the street and crucified on the building of the culture house. All kids and grownups from the surrounding villages were brought there to see him. The local representatives of the Communist Party gave him as an example of what it means to be a >>bandit<< and what may happen to those who choose this path. Let's try to imagine what it means for a community to witness this, what it means to them when some members of that community are arrested in the middle of the night, what it means to have a close member of your family taken away from you and to have absolutely no information about his or her fate. And imagine this happening in a community where everyone is very close to one another! This has happened for decades all over the country! Many who lived through this are grownups now; they work in different institutions. And we still cannot and do not talk about this, about the memory of trauma, and, even more importantly, about the transgenerational transmission of trauma which is at a maximum level. Studies show that the third generation – those who perceive the memory of trauma the strongest – is the generation of today's adults! Studies in neuroscience call this >>genetic memory<<. This is the memory of today's active Romanian generation! And

we still do not talk about this, we are not interested, we may or may not like the topic, some people refuse to talk about this because they do not want to enter any debate. Or, when we talk, we only do it to argue, not acknowledging this approach is a trap.'

Another sub-theme she thoroughly details is that of identity, which she makes detailed sense of through analogies between the need for facing the memories of the Communist regime and medical diseases of memory, such as amnesia or Alzheimer's disease. In so doing, she also introduces another major theme of her meaning-making process: the transformational role of facing and accepting history on individual and social identities. Mrs. Hașu's focus is on an inescapable lifelong feeling of 'belonging' which is rooted in one's past within a familial and socio-cultural context. The contrast between this detailed image of identitarian belonging and the portrait of the rootless Communist New Human adds dramatism to the narrative considering Family has been one of the fundamental pillars of Romanian lifestyle with strong archaic and religious meanings. Quoting Ana Blandiana – the developer of the Sighet Museum – to back up her attribution of meanings exposes an identitarian connection between Mrs. Hașu and the memorial site. Her perceived effects of Communism on the Romanian society are expressed in statements such as 'human broken apart from [...] his past', 'human without roots', 'powerful ruptures in families', 'permanently confused, and 'lost personal connection with others'. Mrs. Hașu promotes the cure to such symptoms of memory diseases to be found in people's assumption of responsibility for finding out and taking upon themselves their familial and national histories. In her perception, the result of this cure is living as a 'free man', which gains deep metaphysical meanings considering Freedom is both the strongest driving force and the ultimate life goal for Christian believers. :

'It is hard to live with amnesia. Identity means knowing who you are, where you come from, what lies within you, what society you belong to. It is not who you should be against, but your given social, cultural, genetic data. Just like you were given a family, you love this past as something natural to your existence. You belong to it and there is nothing you can do about it, you cannot change it. Identity is not something you can change. You can deny it, you can fight against it, you can be upset about it and curse it. However, no matter what I do, I am still the granddaughter of my grandfather, I am still the daughter of my parents, I am still the sister of my brother. These things are part of us no matter if we die or if we change our name or citizenship. And the only good thing we can do for ourselves is to get to know them because they lie within us. This is who and what we are! Not knowing them is like living with amnesia. I read something that Ana Blandiana said about this. It was linked to the victory of Communism being the creation of the New Human. I believe this is the New Human, the human broken apart from everything that his past was, his values, the world before this regime, a human without roots you can make whatever you want of. Young people can find themselves by knowing this side of history. When they assume responsibility for what they are, they remove themselves from amnesia. Those suffering from Alzheimer do not know who and what they are, they are permanently confused, they cannot recognize their own identity anymore, and they cannot recognize those around them. It is a disease much has been written about because it is hard to cope with. It does not make one roll in pain, but it creates powerful ruptures in families when a member has lost the personal connection with the others. This is why I believe it is important for young people to not suffer from Alzheimer: it enables them to live as free men, to learn and develop from the complexity and different shades of life stories. These

are stories of love, friendship, loyalty, betrayal, bravery, abnegation, all things we can relate to, learn from, and they enable us to keep on moving forward.'

Having already mentioned her firm belief in the moral and identitarian rehabilitation of the Romanian society through educating the youth into the perceived positive values promoted by the former political prisoners, Mrs. Hașu feels the need to reinforce this belief in several other moments of the interview. Such statements reveal a deeply felt vocational calling and assumed responsibility for continuing – albeit by different means – her relatives' value-driven struggle during the Communist regime. The contrast between the repressive and indoctrinating Communist universe – vividly depicted as 'decayed and distorted heritage' and 'stains'- and the world of the former political prisoners – perceived as a world of struggle, verticality, resistance, forgiveness, happiness, and identity – adds dramatism and meaning to her narrative. The regenerative power of young generations becoming aware of their identitarian past is expressed through concepts such as 'hope for tomorrow', 'reestablish these connections', 'heal', or 'remove the stains from this heritage'. Mrs. Hașu brings back the leitmotif of personal assumption of responsibility for initiatives aimed at fixing societal flaws, and expressed is in exclamatory tones which reflect her strong belief and emotional involvement:

'These kids live, and they live in villages where things happened, they have grandparents, they have history, they have parents. They must know this, it is their identity! Of course, you cannot tell them everything that happened during the Pitești Phenomenon. But you can tell them about the struggle, about verticality, about the values the resistance was born from, how the resistance was annihilated, how this world was erased from memory,

how the survivors of terrible conditions managed to maintain their happiness, how they forgave unimaginable things, and how we can link these to our own personal experiences and limitations. The feedback from children was extraordinary, and this strongly encouraged me for the future. [...] The youth are the hope for tomorrow, and they can reestablish these connections. They are the link in a chain, and if this link is missing, only the decayed and distorted heritage will be passed on to the new generations. Young people can heal and remove the stains from this heritage and can stop the decay from spreading towards their children. We have the responsibility to stop this, to not take this across generations because we have already lost so much!'

As her meaning-making unfolds, Mrs. Hașu connects this sub-theme of identitarian rehabilitation through education to another theme she considers important: justice. Through the example of the recent condemnation of Alexandru Vișinescu - the former commander of the Râmnicu Sărat Penitentiary - to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity, she argues for the strong educational and penitential function of such trials while rejecting vengeful judicial initiatives. Such an attitude confirms her compassionate and analytical personality, aimed at deeply understanding the roots of a perceived 'evil' rather than asserting blame. This can be critically connected to her religious upbringing, since Justice is one of the fundamental pillars of Christianity, and Compassion is one of the main values promoted by this religion:

'I believe such trials are needed. Not for imprisoning an old man, but as a necessary process of knowing. These people are questioned for the first time in an official framework. From a historical perspective, their discourse is very important, and so is the

witnesses'. For the first time, people with different views come face to face. For me, this is the stake in such trials. Naming the bad as >>bad<<, the abuse as >>abuse<<, or the crime as >>crime<<. Revenge is nothing but toxic! Calling for such people to be treated the same way they treated the victims means just taking over the Communist speech and methods. [...] For this reason, I believe these trials are important. Not to torture and kill these people, but I like to believe that it may also be a good time for them to really acknowledge what they did. After cursing and spitting journalists, Vişinescu ended up crying and telling the audience >>just let me die!<<. Then he also said, 'and please do not take away my military ranks!'. This is also an interesting statement, and we should try to see how his childhood was, what happened later, what decisions he took. This is the interesting part and trials can help reveal such information.'

A sequence of statements come as a synthesis of Mrs. Haşu's meaning-making process, where she brings together the themes of the destructive effects of the persistence of the Communist regime in post-1989 Romania, the hope in the regenerative power of the identitarian education of young generations of Romanians, and the personal assumption of individual responsibility for initiatives aimed at fixing societal flaws. She makes sense of these themes by contrasting words such as 'lacking', 'lost', effects of trauma', and 'evil of those decades' to concepts such as 'healing', 'forgiveness', 'breaking away', 'knowing', and 'being present'. The fact that she connects all of these statements to personally felt familial dramas critically reveals that childhood memories of living in fear under the Communist regime and the lifelong interaction with the world of the former political prisoners have led to an ontological transformation of her attribution of meaning and life choices:

'I perceive today's society by discovering it through this identitarian framework. I see what we are lacking, I assume much of this we have lost during the Communist regime and I can identify the reasons and connections for such assumptions. I can see and personally feel the effects of trauma on families, but I also see and believe in healing – a lengthy process I witnessed unfolding itself. I believe in forgiveness as a chance of breaking away from the evil of those decades, I believe in knowing as a gateway to understanding and living in the present, and I believe in being present in the present. We need to develop a critical mass of individuals who believe in being present and in the personal assumption of responsibility. Otherwise, it is all empty talk and I doubt will be able to move forward as a society.'

- **Portrait Number 18: Mr. Cristian Tudor-Popescu**

Relevance to Study: Leading Romanian journalist (voted four times as Romania's best journalist and political analyst). Organizer of conferences on the topic of censorship under the Communist regime.

One of the first associations Mr. Tudor-Popescu makes upon hearing the topic under investigation is between his family and the Communist ideology. More precisely, he links Communism to a painful childhood memory – the separation of his parents. The fact that he begins with this link critically reveals it as the foundation of his entire meaning-making on the topic:

'My mother was a member of the Communist party. She completely believed in and adhered to Communism. My father not, right on the contrary. And this was one of the reasons for their separation. My father was never able to >>digest<< Communism. He also ended up being a Party member in the 1970s only to obtain a house. However, he never truly adhered to the ideology.'

Another occasion when he brings back the theme of childhood memories is when he associates his perceived upbringing under the Communist regime to the censorship and secrecy of the times. The mentioning of one of the most important politicians in the history of modern Romania – Corneliu Coposu - adds dramatism to his narrative. He perceives the anti-Communist revolution in 1989 as a decisive moment in his personal development, as it enabled societal freedom of expression and liberalization of information:

'I did not know – see, I am the perfect example of a young person raised during the Communist regime – about the amplitude of the oppression in the works camps, prisons. I did not even know at the time who Corneliu Coposu⁵⁰ was. I would hear some rumors occasionally, but unconfirmed. I found out all of these after 1989 when I gained contact with such information. [...] Starting from the censorship in cinematography – my favorite subject – I naturally got to historical aspects tangential to cinematography. I visited the Sighet and Râmnicu Sărat memorials. I read a lot on the topic.'

⁵⁰ Corneliu Coposu – Important Romanian politician, member of the National Peasants' Party. He spent 17 years in the Communist prisons and forced relocation.

Mr. Tudor-Popescu brings back his childhood memories once more, this time to illustrate the transformative effect the meetings with former political prisoners had on his personality. The perceived magnitude of this ontological experience is visible from the frequent repetition of ‘shock’ over a few sentences. He also employs a mélange of metaphors and (self)irony, which critically reveal both his strong intellectual background and a strongly perceived bitterness with himself for falling for the Communist illusion and with the USSR for behaving in ways which broke this illusion. Self-irony, sarcasm, and dark humor are means employed by Mr. Tudor-Popescu throughout the interview to make sense of the investigated topic. Self-irony is evident in moments when he portrays himself as a professor of manipulation and propaganda who had become the victim of manipulation and propaganda. The anecdote of his naïve question about the invasion of Czechoslovakia and his father’s blunt answer uses dark humor to express the perceived rupture within. Metaphors such as ‘cracks’ add palpability, while adjectives such as ‘demented’, ‘deathly’ or ‘terrible’ and the mentioning of important Romanian politicians such as Ion Mihalache add dramatism to his sense-making. His emphasis on the power of ‘humane’ stories of suffering in the Communist prisons over years of indoctrination reinforce the ontological transformational role the encounters with former political prisoners had over Mr. Tudor-Popescu’s meaning-making process:

‘They produced shocks. Shocks! I could not understand! I am a professor of propaganda and manipulation, and I realized that I had always been a victim-child of the Communist manipulation! That is why I know it so well! Because I went through all the sieves and crookeries of the Communist manipulation I have been objected to since childhood! I know it well. Before 1968 I wholeheartedly believed in the USSR. I saw it as a realm of

Goodness, Beauty, and Love for the People, who is helping us the Romanians as a Big Brother. All this propaganda had a strong effect on me. When did the cracks start to appear in my head?! In 1968 when my dad told me that the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia. Something collapsed in my mind. How could the friendly and supportive Russians invade them?! >> By tanks! << my dad replied. Similar moments I had when meeting people who had been political prisoners. When they were telling me about the torture, for example, the demented torture through silence in Râmnicu Sărat. That the guards had rubber soles and the prisoners could not utter any sound. Not even when they died! Occasionally, someone like Ion Mihalache started screaming in the deathly silence of the prison. While finding this out, I experienced terrible shocks! All the propaganda poured into my head year after year crushed into such terrible humane truths. These people were not boasting about ideological fights. They were just humane stories! The way they were humiliated and tortured in prison!’

In a different instance of the interview, he brings back the theme of the transformational role the meetings with former political prisoners had on his life and personality. He makes sense of this theme by remembering the image of Ion Dezideriu Sîrbu⁵¹, whose strong influence on his life he attributes to his choice of prison over framing one of the most important Romanian philosophers, Lucian Blaga, at the request of the Communist authorities. Mr. Tudor-Popescu’s emphasis on ‘dared’ reveals a personality which places courage, Truth, and Freedom at its core:

⁵¹ Ion Dezideriu Sîrbu – Romanian philosopher, essayist, novelist. He spent 6 years in Communist prisons and labor camps.

'Of course, I ended up meeting people who suffered greatly. For example, Ion Dezideriu Sîrbu. He marked my existence as a writer and as a human being. He ended up becoming a political detainee because he dared to defend Lucian Blaga in times when many were condemning him.'

Adding further dramatism to the story in the same narrative style are instances of insults, hardship and life-threatening situations faced by Mr. Tudor-Popescu in the name of perceived freedom of speech and journalist deontology. To express the dramatism of such moments, he employs concepts such as 'break legs', 'skulls', 'cancer', or 'trembling hands'. His emotional implication in the story and also his personality which values courage and freedom of expression are visible in a mix of imperative remarks, rhetorical questions, and foul language. In so doing, he portrays the Romanian society in the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution and introduces another major theme of the interview – the persistence of former Communist individuals, values and practices in the contemporary Romanian society at all levels. In the name of freedom of expression and against all vicissitudes, he calls the first president of post-1989 Romania – Ion Iliescu – as the political and behavioral successor of the former Communist dictator:

'I was almost excluded from the press on several occasions. In December 1990, there was an almost deadly explosion of fury aimed at me. [...] In those times you cannot imagine people's reaction when reading a critique of the de facto successor of the Beloved Leader. [...] We got daily calls naming us >>rats<< and threatening to break our legs because we criticized Iliescu. I will never forget what a lady wrote to me: >>may cancer eat your little fingers you used to write against our beloved Ion Iliescu<<. I was receiving letters

*with skulls and other threats. [...] I had tough moments in my career. There were moments when my hand was trembling with fear when wanting to unlock my car. But you know what? You get used to it! This is the human nature, even fear erodes! You get to the point of saying >>go f**k yourself, what will you do to me?!'<< You get bored of feeling scared. Luckily or not, you get used to anything.'*

When referring precisely to the Sighet Memorial, Mr. Tudor-Popescu mentions he visited it twice and had completely different perceptions of the place. He attributes this negative change in perception to the recent renovations and re-interpretation attempted by the museum developers. To the perceived *in situ* attributes which filled his first visit with meaning, he contrasts the perceived staged authenticity of his second visit, as suggested by words such as 'props' or 'exhibition of cardboards'. Considering Mr. Tudor-Popescu has a PhD in cinematography and a declared interest in the topic of manipulation in the Romanian cinematography, his mentioning of movies displayed at the Sighet Memorial critically reveals an identitarian – albeit negative – connection to the site. In making sense of this experience, he uses a mix of blunt exclamatory and accusatory statements, rhetorical questions, sarcasm, and metaphors. His indignation with the developers' choice of renovations and interpretation is obvious in critical words such as 'unacceptable', 'completely wrong', 'grave mistake', and in his explicit intention of never visiting it again under current museal conditions:

'I visited it twice, with a few years' gap. And I did not really like what I saw on my second visit. The first time Sighet was just like Râmnicu Sărat. The terror, fear, suffering sprang, radiated from its walls. The heavy air of death, of pain...you could feel it! It kept its

meaning! I must feel the icy breeze of death and pain and never forget it! Four or five years later – around 2005-2006 – I went again. Loads of new props were in place, all sorts of panels with information on Lech Wałęsa, on forbidden movies. I could see the real martyrs being crucified on the wall! Next to Maniu, Mihalache, Brătianu, Coposu I could find the movie >>Sezonul pescărușilor<< [The Season of Seagulls] and >>Adio, dragă Nela<< [Goodbye, dear Nela]. This is unacceptable! I cherish and respect Mrs. Blandiana, but this direction is completely wrong! Lech Wałęsa and Solidarność are important, but what are they doing in the Sighet Memorial?! It is a different regime, why do we mix up the stories? A lot of the original area was destroyed to make space for this exhibition of cardboard. A grave mistake in my opinion! If it remains the same, I have no intention of going there again!’

Having openly criticized the interpretation at the Sighet Memorial, Mr. Tudor-Popescu comes back to the topic of museography in the context of recent societal discussions for the development of a museum focused on the Communist period in the capital city of Romania. He makes sense of this aspect by calling for this ideology and its effects to be given the same importance as Fascism or Nazism. Again, dark humor and sarcasm are tools he employs to deliver the message. His emotional involvement is evident through the use of rhetorical questions, imperative remarks, and concepts such as ‘absolutely unfair’. Mr. Tudor-Popescu further makes sense of this aspect by placing it in the context of a contemporary wave of opinion which promotes the crimes committed during the Communist regime as mistakes which can be forgiven since positive things were arguably also achieved during those times. He imperatively calls for any museal initiatives on this topic to combat this wave and focus precisely on the crimes of the

regime. His emphasis on replacing ‘mistakes’ with ‘crimes’ reveals an outspoken personality who values the assumption of personal responsibility for one’s decisions, actions, and effects. Mr. Tudor-Popescu’s reference to the ‘price in human lives, in broken destinies’ further exposes a humane and compassionate aspect of his meaning-making process, while, at the same time, subtly criticizing those who are willing to distort history for certain benefits:

‘Of course, it is needed! We need a Museum of Communism just like there are Museums of the Holocaust, for example in Washington. It is a natural thing to have in Romania. We have enough things to put on display, no?! It should have the same regime as a Museum of Fascism or Nazism. Because this differentiation which has been done and is still done at European level of not placing Communism on the same level as Nazism should be erased! It is absolutely unfair! Developing a Museum of the History of Communism with clear, detailed sections to gain perspective(s) of the >>network of terror<< in Romania is a must! Images of the hunger in the 1970s and 1980s, of the women who died during illegal abortions and so on can give a full image of what Communism was. The interest of those who try to >>whitewash<< this history is >>fragmentarism<<. They are trying to show that, indeed, mistakes were made but also good things were achieved. Only when getting a full picture, you stop believing that not the mistakes, but the crimes of the Communist regime can be somehow counter-balanced by the authentically good things done during those times. Good things were done. It was a form of modernizing Romania. However, never will the price in human lives, in broken destinies be equivalent to the good things done during the Communist times!’

As his meaning-making process unfolds, Mr. Tudor-Popescu brings together several themes to explain his view on the importance of Romanians in general and the youth in particular to know the dark aspects of history under the Communist regime. One theme becoming a leitmotif of the interview is that of the continuation of the Communist apparatus in post-1989 Romania. In the same vivid language employed throughout the interview, he portrays this apparatus as a ‘body’, ‘caste’ and ‘sect’. In other words, he sees it as a coagulated entity with inherited privileges, separated from the rest of society based on an interest-driven doctrine. Again, he pinpoints the first president of post-1989 Romania – Ion Iliescu – as the initiator and *de facto* leader of what Mr. Tudor-Popescu sees as a phenomenon of purposeful distortion of history through societal manipulation. Another recurring theme throughout the interview is that of responsibility which he analyses from two perspectives. Firstly, it is the personal assumption of responsibility for actively combating such initiatives in what he graphically labels as ‘counter-propaganda’. Secondly, it is the need for those responsible for the crimes under the Communist regime to be known as responsible and held accountable for their actions. With this, Mr. Tudor-Popescu introduces the theme of Justice to his meaning-making in the context of the recent conviction of former Communist prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. He makes sense of this aspect by linking it with the aforementioned themes and arguing Alexandru Vişinescu was only a pawn in the Communist apparatus and implying that no one else was held accountable precisely because of the continuation of the former elements and practices of the Communist regime in the contemporary Romanian society. He expresses his views in a series of open accusations, blunt language, imperative remarks, rhetorical questions, and sarcasm:

'Forgetting these historical aspects is nothing but the continuation of the old Communist and Bolshevik propaganda. All of those - for example, Iliescu - I hear nowadays saying that >>we should not dig out the dead<< and that we have more serious problems to focus on are the unquestionable successors of the old Bolshevik propaganda. So, we need such projects! What I am trying to do here is a counter-propaganda to the manipulation through forgetfulness such individuals are attempting! They have a precise interest! If such cruel historical episodes are brought into the spotlight, then people in diverse public structures are found as responsible. Vişinescu is in prison, for example, but where is the judge who convicted these people to prison?! There was a whole mechanism, and Vişinescu was the final executant, but where are the rest?! Why are they not trialed for their actions? These shows networks and structures. All of these have successors. The judicial system, the secret services, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, all of them are the successors to those structures. Moreover, what persists in all of them is a feeling of >>body<<. The problem of Romania has never been the external influences the Beloved Leader was dreaming about but the internal structures and networks. The successors' structures do not like when people discuss what their predecessors did because it can end up affecting the >>body<<, the >>caste<<, the >>sect<< these individuals represent.'

One theme Mr. Tudor-Popescu feels the need to spend a considerable amount of time and detail on is the perceived ontological personal transformation brought into his life by the fall of the Communist regime. Through bold statements, allegories, references to physical and metaphysical forces, and even foul language, he provides an intimate and dramatic experiential portrait which symbolically resembles the Biblical sacrificial destiny of one who is carrying his own Cross in the name of Truth. His perception of self

pre-1989 is expressed through the repetition of ‘personal failure’ and ‘loser’, while the vivid metaphor ‘the dust under the shoe of a cretin brute’ portrays his perceived life under the Communist regime. The bleak and hopeless portrayal of his life before the 1989 Revolution is dramatically and vividly expressed in statements such as ‘sinister individuals [...] will piss on my tombstone’ and ‘waiting to die with that lead-like horizon’. His open critique of those who joined the Communist Party for benefits and success critically reconfirms his Truth and Freedom-driven personality. Metaphysical aspects of his sense-making are clearly visible in his references to non-human inner presences and mechanisms which drive his choices and actions. To the pessimist image of life before 1989, Mr. Tudor-Popescu contrasts the change brought about by the fall of Communism. He expresses this change in one powerful word – Life – which he associates with freedom of expression:

‘In the 1980s I was evolving into a bohemian and irresponsible writer. I was writing science-fiction speculative literature. I was frequently going to literary circles; I was drinking alcohol, I was smoking 50 cigarettes daily, I was a typical bohemian character. I could have ended up this way, as many of my colleagues and friends in those days did. Some internal de-click happened at some point, a sort of fury in which I imagined myself as the dust under the shoe of a cretin brute. The idea that I would be a loser and that all these sinister individuals around me will piss on my tombstone stirred a beastly stubbornness inside of me towards the end of the 1980s. And this feeling of rage, of not being trampled, of not having the fate of a loser artist in front of the pragmatic, aimed-at-success-at-any-cost guys kept me going on until today. It is very hard, harder and harder to extract myself from my bed as if I am rising myself up from my coffin...to start

all over again every morning. I acknowledge a certain internal will which is bigger and stronger than my comprehension. Like a mechanism inside of me which drags me to move forward. I wish I did not, I am extremely tired. But this presence inside of me is almost non-human. It keeps on taking me forward; I do not know where to, I do not know until when or how. However, for now, it animates me like a cyborg. [...] For me the Revolution and the fall of Communism meant Life itself! I would have died, most likely of alcoholism. I was living my personal failure as a form of protest. I did not want to integrate into the society, although I could have done it. I could have easily become a Party member and gained benefits. But I did not want to make any compromise. I was simply, in my own failure, waiting to die with that lead-like horizon. Ceaușescu seemed eternal to me. So, the Revolution meant coming back to life. I could fulfill the sense of my existence: writing.'

Having thoroughly detailed the perceived ontological transformation of self-brought by the fall of the Communist regime, Mr. Tudor-Popescu tackles this theme in the broader context of the Romanian society. His pessimistic perception is visible from the repetition of words such as 'unfortunately', 'aggression' and 'propaganda', to which he adds adjectives such as 'boorish', 'cretin', 'aggressive', or 'noxious'. In the same vivid language he employs throughout the interview, he uses the metaphor 'spitting on my own human condition' to portray his similar perception of hearing the former Communist leader and watching contemporary Romanian TV channels. One statement which synthesizes his perception of societal change is 'I see more cars and fewer humans!'. Here, he draws attention to the fact that progress has only happened on surface levels, while the human quality has regressed. Mr. Tudor-Popescu's high emotional involvement in this theme is visible – just like it has been throughout the interview – in the repetition of words

such as ‘unfortunately’, imperative remarks, vivid language, rhetorical questions, and intimate emotional personal recollections:

‘If I look around, unfortunately, Romania changed too little. Way too little compared to 1989! Someone asked me what I see as the many difference between today’s Romania and 1989’s Romania. What I said was: I see more cars and fewer humans! Unfortunately, I cannot say more than this. The aggression I felt pouring out of the TV before 1989 through the growling voice of Ceaușescu – I was listening to him with a sort of masochism, I was spitting on my own human condition every night listening to him preaching to me through the TV – I still feel today watching the Romanian TV channels. The same boorish aggression against the Being I can notice nowadays, just the means of delivery are different. Sometimes it makes me wonder: what was it for?! So, what did we replace that cretin and aggressive propaganda of the Communists with? With this propaganda delivered by the so-called news and entertainment channels! I cannot even say which one is more noxious. I cannot tell you.’

- **Portrait Number 19: Ms. Oana Stănciulescu**

Relevance to Study: Leading Romanian journalist. Active participant in projects focused on the memory of former political prisoners under the Communist regime.

A clear leitmotif of Ms. Stănciulescu’s meaning-making process is freedom, as expressed in the frequent repetition of the concept throughout the interview. As she makes

sense of the investigated topic, Ms. Stănciulescu details freedom as both a driving force and an ontological ideal of her life. She emphasizes freedom of expression as supreme among freedoms, and calls for the personal assumption of responsibility for maintaining it. In fact, the assumption of responsibility for fixing perceived societal flaws is another crucial theme of the interview. Such statements reveal her chosen profession in journalism as an assumed vocational calling for defending truth and freedom of speech. Her strong emotional involvement in the topic is expressed through exclamatory remarks and the repetition of words such as ‘fight’:

‘I believe this feeling of freedom is in my guts, in my DNA! One thing I can say for sure is that freedom is the most important thing for me. I know now what I truly want in life! Moreover, I believe that freedom should be the most important thing for anyone. The moment you have lost this, you stop existing as an individual, you nullify yourself. I do not speak about the freedom of movement or of traveling abroad, not even about the economic freedom. [...] What I refer to is the freedom of speech, our freedom of expression which we have been giving away piece by piece for the last few years. We should fight when we see someone trying to take away a bit of our freedom. Nothing is irreversible. When entering capitalism, we thought it is irreversible. I do not believe this anymore. So, it is our own individual responsibility to be aware of what is happening to us and to fight for our rights and freedoms.’

In different moments throughout the interview, she connects this fundamental value of her life to memories from her young formative years. She makes sense of this aspect by contrasting instances of anti-Communist opposition – such as secretly listening

to Radio Free Europe, not reciting a poem dedicated to the Communist leader, or the resistance to collectivization – to a portrait of generalized fear and distrust under the Communist regime:

‘I remember my parents listening to Radio Free Europe with the radio hidden under the pillows. [...] One person who may have planted the seeds of freedom and democracy in my heart is my high-school teacher of Romanian language and literature who would expect us to recite poems by Eminescu rather than odes to the Party and the Beloved Leader. For this reason – I found out later – the best students in my class were picked up after class every day and asked to report on our activity to the Securitate. I grew up in a village where they could never achieve collectivization because they were many members of the Legionary Movement and many others who ended up becoming political detainees.’

Having narrated passive actions of resistance initiated by others in her early childhood, Ms. Stănciulescu’s feels the need to also depict active acts of opposition she initiated later in her life. Her temporal reference holds strong meanings considering it refers to the massive sit-in student protests calling for the exclusion of former Communist cadres from functions in the newly-established democratic institutions. The protests were repressed in force by thousands of industrial workers, coal miners, and police, leading to an official number of 6 dead and 746 injured. Ms. Stănciulescu’s narrated act of rebellion hints at such repressive acts being organized by former elements of the Communist apparatus with the purpose of solidifying Mr. Ion Iliescu’s position as the head of state. This is expressed through a fear of ‘going back to the previous regime’. Such a meaning-making process spanning from childhood to present-day reveals a consciously-assumed

ontological transformational process, where her contemporary attitude can trace its roots to memories of her young formative years:

'On 14 June 1990, I had an exam. When I went to pick up the envelope with my exam instructions, I noticed that the supervising professor was reading >>Dimineața<<. In those times, this newspaper was read by those supporting Iliescu and his party. I gave the envelope back and said this is unacceptable! At that time, Bucharest was empty, absolutely no traffic in the city center, deserted. It was a terrifying image, like a SF movie! The thought that we are going back to the previous regime scared me terribly. After graduating from university, I got a job at >>Dreptatea<<. Those who did not support Iliescu read this newspaper in those times. Twenty-six years later, I am on the same path and in the same niche.'

In the same line of an ontological transformation in the name of freedom, she details the effects meeting former political detainees had on her personality. Her choice of words reveals the nature of this perceived transformation: 'freedom', 'truth', 'vertical', 'dignified', 'strength', 'values', 'God', and 'democracy'. Adding meaning and dramatism to the narrative are references to the torturous treatment the political prisoners were subjected to inside the Communist prisons without giving up their values. She uses this analogy to express her dedication to freedom of expression and to criticize those who choose to stay quiet for benefits. Her strong opinions and emotional involvement in the topic are visible through a mix of exclamatory remarks and rhetorical questions. Mentioning God adds metaphysical meanings to her narrative considering Truth and Freedom are both the fundamental drivers and the ultimate life goals in Christian belief:

'At >>Dreptatea<< I worked side by side with former political detainees. My first boss in journalism was Corneliu Coposu. He is one of the few statesmen who truly know what freedom means. [...] They have changed my life! They made me realize it is imperative to know the truth and pay it forward. They showed me that there are still vertical people among us. [...] Each Romanian – from the youngest to the eldest – should be aware of this! If we do not know our history, our ancestors, we are nothing, we are nobody! Knowing them gives us the strength to move forward and to be vertical and dignified. This is the effect meeting these people and getting to know the recent history of Romania had on my personality. They gave me the strength to resist and keep on fighting over the last 26 years. We can understand why many allowed themselves to be bought, why they gave up on their values and allowed themselves to be tempted. On the other hand, these political detainees accepted to be subjected to horrific treatments for 15-20 years for what they believed in: verticality, freedom, God, and democracy! It would have been easy just to sign a paper and deny everything! They would go home and have a good life. They were subjected to unimaginable tortures in the name of these values! If they had such strength, how can I now accept to keep my mouth shut just because of the fear of losing my job or my financial benefits?!'

Often throughout the interview, Ms. Stănciulescu associates concepts of 'verticality', 'democracy', 'truth', 'fight', 'moral obligation', 'God', 'pray', and 'salvation' to the aforementioned leitmotif of freedom. This reveals she perceives journalism as a divine mission for improving Romania through raising awareness about the victims of the Communist regime rather than as a regular job for subsistence. The Christian nature of the meaning-making is clearly visible in her confession of praying

before speaking publicly on topics linked to the victims of the Communist regime, and in the mentioned hope for salvation. Her strong belief in the personal assumption of responsibility for amending societal flaws is expressed through words such as ‘role’, ‘purpose’, ‘fight’ and ‘moral obligation’, and through the frequent use of exclamatory remarks:

‘I realized each of us has a role and a purpose. I felt my purpose in this world is to fight for the Truth. And this fight is based on my belief that our salvation comes if all of us are fighting for it. I am not waiting for a decision from someone high above according to which we are better people starting tomorrow. If more of us, in our chosen field of work, started prioritizing Truth and stopped making compromises, we would start fixing up things. This is my moral obligation! I will tell you a little secret. Whenever I go live on TV, and especially on such topics, I pray to those who died in the Communist prisons to help me have a good show because I can help their voice be heard. We have a moral obligation! Once I realized this, I cannot go on any other path! Losing a few jobs or financial benefits is a small price to pay in the fight for freedom!’

To materialize and personalize this assumed mission in the name of Freedom, Ms. Stănciulescu exemplifies issues she has directly faced because of her active interest in the topic of Communist crimes:

‘I lost two jobs. Very often they try to stop you from doing your projects the way you plan to do them. These aspects belong to each individual’s personal fight and struggle.’

Other existential features of the contemporary Romanian society she associates – albeit in a contrasting sense-making process – to the mentioned leitmotif of Freedom are

‘manipulation’, ‘censorship’, ‘compromise’, and ‘fear’. She depicts these features as the continuation of Communist practices and values into modern-day Romania. The perceived magnitude of these characteristics is suggested by the frequent repetition of these terms. Considering she is one of the leading investigative journalists of Romania, Ms. Stănciulescu’s blunt and detailed statements present a stark, realistic, and credible insider’s perspective of current memorial power games in Romania. To such societal features, she contrasts attitudes such as ‘courage’, ‘normality’, ‘wake up’, ‘make different choices’, ‘change’, ‘know’, and ‘pay it forward’. Having already promoted the values of the former political prisoners as a solid foundation for the regeneration of the Romanian society, Ms. Stănciulescu reiterates her perceived mission for creating awareness of these values:

‘If more of us knew about the struggle of these people and understood the meaning of their suffering, we would not allow ourselves to be bought, blackmailed, or manipulated anymore. We are manipulated, and manipulation in Romania has become an art: it is done by the press, by the politicians, by the secret services. People nowadays have no time to confront sources, so they just trust what TV presenters are saying. If only we knew these techniques, we would make different choices. [...] Censorship of sensitive historical topics is still practiced to a large extent in media and journalism, and I think it is a much deeper and wide-spread practice than it was 20 years ago. We were treated like a herd for 20 years. When the people started realizing this, the methods for censorship and manipulation became more refined and subtle. [...] No one has opened people’s eyes, so his or her manipulation by those who are not willing to lose the financial benefits they have gained over the last 26 years is effortless. They bought people. The secret services

obscurely hired many people from the media and journalism, from the judicial system and the civil society, from the unions. The moment you take money from them, you cannot write freely anymore. [...] We got to live in aberrations. I receive calls from people who want to congratulate me on having >>courage<<. Can you realize the levels of fear and manipulation in our present-day society if speaking out is seen as courage?! Speaking out for the memory of those people who spent years in the Communist prisons is not courage, is normality! We have reached a very dangerous point, and it is time for us to wake up. I consider my generation had not done much and because of them we have reached this point. My hope is with future generations, but to change something they first must know. That is why it is important for anyone who finds out the truth to pay it forward. Thanks to these social media platforms you can nowadays tell the truth if you know it and you have good intentions. I hope that it is not too late.'

One emotional confession reveals Ms. Stănciulescu's perceived effect of such censorship and manipulation on the Romanian society – the large-scale unawareness of Communist crimes. She makes sense of this aspect by contrasting the image of a female political prisoner sexually abused by the prison staff to a divine portrait expressed through concepts such as 'blessed', 'God', and 'confess'. The contrast between these two narrated images gains further meaning and dramatism considering Love and Compassion for other beings are the main values promoted by Christianity:

'One female political prisoner I spoke to had been raped by the prison guards with bottles, metal rods and so on. Abominable and unthinkable things happened to these people. [...] We are extremely blessed to be contemporary with these people who were left on Earth

by God to confess. They are still among us, but for many Romanians, these former political prisons are just like ghosts: they walk by us, the queue or eat next to us and we have no idea they are living history books.'

In different moments of her meaning-making progression, she delves deeper in the sub-theme of manipulation and censorship of the memory of Communist repression by linking it to the presence of former Communist cadres in the present-day public apparatus whose primary purpose is money-making. She makes sense of this aspect in blunt, accusatory language:

'Many of those who have ruled Romania after 1989 are former cadres or the heirs of the Communist regime before 1989, so they have no interest for such things to be known. Others are just dumb and cynical and only care for their own pockets. [...] Those responsible [for the crimes committed during the 1989 Revolution and the miners' violent repression of student protesters in Bucharest in June 1990] then entered the political system and are still among those who rule the nation.'

Under the same umbrella of transformation in the name of freedom, Ms. Stănciulescu brings the sub-theme of justice in the discussion by tackling the recent condemnation of Mr. Vişinescu – the former commander of the Râmnicu Sărat penitentiary for political prisoners – to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. She stresses the fundamentally educational function of such judicial acts in the spirit of 'never again', and calls for following in the footsteps of the Jewish people's thorough and sustained justice-seeking. Her repetition of 'good' and 'bad', 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' reveals her emphasis is on the moral regeneration of the Romanian society.

Throughout the interview she pinpoints the leaders of the Communist Party as responsible for political decisions leading to the repressive actions:

'Had he not been trialed and convicted, young generations could have rightfully believed his actions as a prison commander were good. If we, as a society, do not say what is good and what is bad, what is acceptable and what is not, then it can be assumed that it is ok to repeat certain behaviors. One may rightfully think that oppressing people is a good way of having a good life and financial benefits. The Jews know how to fight for their freedom and their rights. We should do the same and tell children this is unacceptable behavior and that those who commit such actions will eventually pay for them. But not only former prison commanders should pay for what they did, but also those who gave the political decisions. The prison commanders did not suddenly decide one morning that they have to treat detainees the way they did. The Communist Party chose this line, and I am yet to see a leader of the Party trialed and convicted for the political decisions taken before 1989. Justice is absolutely essential!'

When asked precisely about the Sighet Memorial, Ms. Stănciulescu mentions several visits and even filming a TV programme in the cell where Iuliu Maniu died. She praises its pioneering and educational roles, and perceives it as a godsend. Her positive impression is expressed through words such as 'wonderful' and 'truly grateful', and through the exclamatory tone of her statements:

'I believe it is a wonderful thing it exists! It is the only one we have on this topic, and I can only thank God it exists! Of course, each individual has a certain perception about a project, it is only natural. Some are pleased, others not so much. I am truly grateful for

its existence, if only because it allowed tens of thousands of visitors – especially young people - to discover this side of history!’

She further makes sense of the Sighet Memorial by placing it in the context of recent societal discussions for the establishment of a museum about the Communist period in the capital city. The repetition of ‘crimes’ in an assertive tone reveals the importance Ms. Stănciulescu places on facing the sensitive and painful aspects of history. She makes sense of this topic by contrasting her support for such memorial initiatives to her disapproval of political interests and corruption usually surrounding such projects:

‘If others have better ideas, there are plenty of places where they can put them into practice. [...] We must know the crimes! It should be the Museum of Communist Crimes! [...] If anyone wants to do one, I am grateful! However, let’s focus on what we have, and we can save already. Let’s try to save these former prisons. [...] I think for some of those who initiated such projects it was an exercise of boosting their image, while for others it was an exercise of subsistence. While developing such a project, those involved have a stable source of income, and they must deliver something at the end of it. Maybe this is the only explanation. I have tried to answer the question why the Sighet Memorial remains the only one. I cannot explain why a nation losing hundreds of millions of euro yearly was unable to spend a couple of million to introduce these former prisons in the educational and touristic frameworks.’

In another instance, she details the identitarian transformational function of such memorial projects. Ms. Stănciulescu makes sense of this aspect by employing a symbolic analogy between a person who does not know one’s past and another who does not know

one's parents. She expresses her perception through an intermingled series of rhetorical questions and imperative remarks. The repeated reference to 'orphan(s)', 'parents', 'grandparents', 'heritage', and 'blood' adds strong dramatism and meaning to her narrative considering Family is one of the fundamental existential pillars for Christian Romanians. This is reinforced in her remark about Romanians who chose to suffer during the Communist regime rather than giving up their values and religious belief. Ms. Stănciulescu's choice of speaking about the interwar elite imprisoned by the Communist authorities adds further meaning to her sense-making process since those were the times of the national unification, and of substantial economic and educational progress:

'How can you move forward if you do not know who you are?! Just as an adopted orphan is spending the entire life looking for one's parents. We are a nation of orphans! I want to know my grandparents, with their good and bad deeds! How can you know who you are if someone suddenly tells you that all the history that matters starts in 1945?! We should be proud of the long heritage line of our people! Why do we read books?! To share other peoples' experiences! Same with our past! We need to know it to know who we have been and who we are today. Our blood is their blood! If I can connect to someone like Elisabeta Rizea, I will not allow myself to be bought so easily. If that woman resisted such terrible treatment without selling out, how could I do it now?! How many other nations can be proud of so many people who resisted tortures and humiliations only to protect their values and their belief?! [...] If we realize that all the elite who built modern Romania during the World Wars was imprisoned by the Communists, we suddenly get a different identity and perspectives.'

One particular statement about the Sighet Memorial represents a synthesis of Ms. Stănciulescu's thinking on the topic. She perceives and promotes the Sighet Memorial as a core of freedom, democracy, dignity, and resistance for a suffering Romanian nation. She makes sense of this aspect through a series of statements where she contrasts the profiles of the former political prisoners to vivid descriptions of the conditions they were subjected to in the Sighet Prison. Her dedication to her assumed cause and her emotional involvement in the topic and suggested by the exclamatory tone of her remarks:

'It is the place where the prime-minister who achieved the dream of unifying the nation was tortured! Upon his death, he was secretly shoved into a sack, dragged down the stairs, and thrown into a mass grave on the town's outskirts only because he wanted freedom and democracy for his people! The Memorial is the place where so many heroes of this nation were chained down in the middle of the cell so that they could not commit suicide by smashing their heads into the wall. This place means tremendous suffering, but also incredible dignity and resistance! It should be a compulsory visit for any Romanian and his or her kids. The Sighet Memorial should be the epicenter of Romania!'

- **Portrait Number 20: Mr. Dan Puric**

Relevance to Study: Leading Romanian artist. Organizer of and participant in events related to the memory of the victims of Communist totalitarianism in Romania.

Mr. Puric begins his sense-making on the researched topic with childhood memories of perceived fear, forceful lack of freedom, and international betrayal. To attribute meaning to the topic, he employs a mix of historical analogies, exclamatory statements, metaphors, and blunt criticism of the Communists and those who allowed them to come to power. His perception of the nature of growing up during the Communist regime is expressed in words such as ‘ghetto’, ‘prisoner’, ‘serfdom’, ‘schizoid’, ‘terror’, and ‘fear’. Mr. Puric’s reference to the meeting between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin at Yalta in 1945 speaks of a strong feeling of betrayal, as it is nowadays known that it was at the Yalta Conference that the spheres of influence were renegotiated close to the end of World War II⁵². This feeling of betrayal is expressed in the connection of three words: ‘consequence’, ‘guiltier’, and ‘criminal’. The repetition of ‘ghetto’ adds meanings and strength to the narrative as it symbolically connects those suffering under Communism to those suffering under the Nazi regime. Mr. Puric’s intimate childhood memories reveal freedom as a fundamental life value which he associates to his upbringing in the spirit of critical thinking, to the interwar period, and to owning land. For a declared Christian

⁵² For a comprehensive analysis of the implications of the 1945 Yalta Conference for Romania, see Scurtu & Buzatu (2010).

believer such as Mr. Puric, this is presumed to hold deeper meanings as Freedom and Land have strong religious and archaic connotations in Romanian culture. Freedom is seen as the fundamental driving force and the ultimate life goal in one's life, while owning Land is perceived as the means of achieving freedom in a physical world. To add dramatism to his narrative, he contrasts his strong belief in freedom to the 'fear' and 'terror' brought by the Communist regime to his life:

'I was formed in a ghetto-style society. As a born prisoner. There used to be a law around 1514 issued by a Hungarian nobleman after the uprising of Gheorghe Doja which sentenced us – the Romanians – to perpetual serfdom. I was a consequence of the little note Roosevelt and Churchill passed from one to the other – they are guiltier than Stalin who was a pure criminal, but Roosevelt and Churchill were pretending to be civilized Westerners! So, I was a consequence; I was born already a prisoner. The society was already schizoid because the Communist-style Socialism focused on nationalist idolatry and exaltation had already been imposed. [...] My father, poor guy, did not get involved in politics but he owned land in Dobrudja. When the Communists came, he self-exiled in a village called Nehoiu. They would arrest people for nothing! My father was a lieutenant. My mum later told me that for many years my dad always had poison in his pocket with the purpose of killing himself had the Communists decided to arrest him. A fantastic terror! I had no political prisoners in my family. However, there was no need to; we were all civilian detainees! [...] On the other hand, there was the subterranean information which slipped out at home. Not too much, because of the extraordinary fear in society. My dad would not tell me much, just to read certain books, to pay attention and question everything. I think I was also born with a certain intuition of my life in a ghetto. There

was no one telling me this. But I could see relics of a different era of freedom which have been crushed.'

One major theme throughout the interview is the continuation of the pre-1989 system into post-1989 Romania, which Mr. Puric details thoroughly in different moments and different societal contexts. One aspect is the political seizure of essential state positions and business opportunities after 1989 by former cadres and activists of the Communist Party and the Securitate. He connects this continuation with perceived purposeful attempts to censor the memorialization and commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime and to diffuse the national identity, as expressed in adjoined statements such as 'bought [...] and burned', 'minimalizing and mockery', and 'lose their identity'. In making sense of this, he repeatedly reiterates the notion of international betrayal. His emotional involvement in the topic is expressed through a mix of accusatory remarks, analogies, and metaphors:

'We are still ruled by former members of the Securitate who profited from the Revolution and seem to be ever-so-confident that no one can shake them of his or her ruling seats. They have a terrible nerve! They do this with the financing and support from Occidental nations. The Occident crushed us again! Had they wanted to, they could completely cut the connection between present-day Romania and former authorities rather than encourage the Romanian youth to seek a better life and lose their identity abroad. Many books of memoirs were bought by the Securitate and burned. Another phenomenon is the minimalizing and mockery of memoirs. [...] Romania is still a large penitentiary carefully

managed by officers nowadays dressed up as civilians. Before they were members of the militia and Securitate, nowadays they are civilians.'

In a different point of the interview, he reiterates the persistence of individuals, values, and practices of the Communist regime in the contemporary Romanian society by tackling recent governmental initiatives of canceling certain benefits for the former political prisoners. He makes sense of this aspect in a mix of harsh language, irony, and metaphor. His reference to Brussels implies the continuation of international betrayal that Mr. Puric previously bluntly mentioned. The historical analogy of the 1784 rebellion initiated in Transylvania by Horia, Cloșca, and Crișan symbolically reveals his perception of the political detainees as following in Christ's sacrificial footsteps, and of the former cadres and supporters of the Communist Party and Securitate choosing Judas' path of betrayal. One of the main means Mr. Puric employs throughout the interview to make sense of the investigated topic is the contrast between the corruption and censorship of internal and external interest-driven authorities and the values of Christianity. His perceived nature of the corrupt and censoring authorities is expressed in words such as 'bastard' or 'rotten traitors':

'Being bastard former members of the Securitate, most of the authorities tried to camouflage, to minimize what happened. Nowadays, they also try to humiliate them by removing even those small compensations former detainees received. Political prisoners have derisory pensions while former torturers have hundreds or thousands of euro per months. They do not discuss this in Brussels; they are shy. I remember the uprising of Horia, Cloșca, and Crișan. Upon the defeat of the uprising, Horia and Cloșca sought

refuge in the mountains. In the nearby village, the Austrian authorities promised 300 golden coins for anyone who helped them capture Horia and Cloșca. The amount is interesting, as it resembles the 300 silver coins received by Judas to betray Christ. Seven peasants from the village betrayed them, and they were finally captured. Upon their execution, Horia said he forgives the seven villagers from the bottom of his heart. Cloșca asked for all his possessions to be given to the Church so that his name is mentioned in prayers. Their last sigh remained Christian! Coming back to the families of those who got the 300 golden coins. They lived well for a while; they made children, who made other children and so on...and this is how the Romanian parliament was born! This type of rotten traitors!’

One other instance where Mr. Puric chooses to bluntly speak about the continuity of the former Communist repressive system into present-day Romania is when narrating the problems he has faced because of his projects focused on the memory of the victims of Communist totalitarianism. This perceived continuity is expressed through the label of ‘old and new Securitate officers’ whose effect on society is ‘poison’. He makes sense of this aspect through a combination of rhetorical questions, straightforward language, and spiritual and historical analogies. The narrated contrast between these analogies of resistance and his own personal struggles, and the quoting of Gheorghe Brătianu – a leading Romanian historian and politician deceased in the Sighet Penitentiary – symbolically reveals a perceived and assumed divine calling of fighting in the name of the values promoted by the former political prisoners. The perceived positive nature of this sustained faith-driven struggle is suggested in words such as ‘immune’, ‘resuscitation’, ‘moving in the right direction’, ‘future’, and ‘hope’. Mr. Puric’s frequent

references to and examples from Christianity reveals the profoundly spiritual nature of his meaning and decision-making processes:

'The old and new Securitate officers started attacking me. The first thing they do is to publicly demonize you through labeling: fascist, far-right extremist and so on. The interesting fact is the Romanian people seem immune to this poison for years now. I am a simple man with simple means; they have almost unlimited resources. How come Romanians do not fall for this?! The entire press – bought as they are – wrote all possible trash about me. There seems to be a resuscitation of the Romanian nation. There has been an intense movement towards my annihilation, but it does not seem to work. Something within this nation seems to be moving in the right direction. The future of this nation is not now, but it is at some point! We must look towards it! As Saint Paul said: >>Hope, but what hope is that which is visible?<< You cannot see anything, you are looking towards God. In the book of Apocalypse, Saint John said: >>I can see the image, the candlestick of light has been given to the Jews. They did not believe. So the candlestick was taken away from them.<< The Romanian people must do anything they can so this candlestick is not taken away from them. This extraordinary faith has saved us. And it is a very natural faith, not one leading to conflicts. During the Ottoman times, we were defending against the Turks and the Austrians. So many temptations, just like nowadays. Just like Gheorghe Brătianu said: >>the only friend Romania has is the Black Sea. And God above!<<'

In a different moment of the interview, Mr. Puric feels the need to deepen this narrative of an assumed and sustained fight in the name of the values defended by former

political detainees. He promotes personal assumption of responsibility by symbolically adjoining an Asian philosophical analogy and statements rooted in Christian belief. The latter reinforces his actions as a perceived answer to a divine calling:

'I trained in judo and taekwondo. Not for fighting, but for disciplining my soul. I heard a very good Zen story. They used to have rooster fights. The emperor sent someone to the greatest trainer to train his rooster for fights. After two months the trainer was asked if the rooster was ready. He answered: >>no, when the others are cackling, it hits the grates nervously with its beak<<. He was asked again after six months. The trainer said >>it is not ready; when the others are cackling, it blinks<<. Asked again after two years, he said: >>it is now ready; when the others are cackling, it is serene<<. I learned from that rooster. I keep doing what I have to do. You cannot fight a devil, as the devils fight each other. Of course, they will not stop here. [...] Hell is very complicated, but Heavens are so simple. I let them do their job, and I keep doing mine.'

Throughout his meaning-making process, he brings the themes of political continuity and international betrayal into the discussion one more time when referring to the 1989 Revolution and the post-1989 Romanian society. In so doing, he maintains the same outspoken attitude and blunt yet metaphorical language, where the post-1989 political system is depicted as a 'caricature of democracy,' and the nature of politicians is portrayed as 'the gutter of society'. The perceived nature of the transition between the pre-1989 Communist totalitarian system and the post-1989 democratic capitalist one is metaphorically referred to as moving from a 'zoo' to a 'free-shooting jungle':

'It took me two days to realize it is a coup d'état and two weeks to realize we had been sold once more to the West. So, I had to learn to clear my mind because this was going to be a lengthy process. What followed was a caricature of democracy where the gutter of society became ministers. We exited the zoo and entered the free-shooting jungle.'

Under the thematic umbrella of the continuity of the pre-1989 system into post-1989 Romanian society, Mr. Puric does not only detail his perception on the political continuity but also feels the need to emphasize the intellectual side of this continuity. To make sense of this sub-theme, he reiterates one of the leitmotifs of his speech: betrayal. In so doing, he directly accuses the post-1989 Romanian intellectuality of the improper memorialization and commemoration of the victims of Communist repression and of a subsequent loss of national identity. This is reflected in words such as 'traitor', 'separatist', 'anesthetized', 'covered', 'obscured', 'deconstruction', 'fake', 'debunking', 'desecration', 'dilution', 'attacked', 'destroy', and 'malignant'. Beyond an internal betrayal, Mr. Puric also brings back into discussion the external aspect of this perceived betrayal when he refers to an 'international occult'. The perceived corrupt and interest-driven nature of this post-1989 intellectuality is expressed in words such as 'bought', 'meal', and 'sell everything'. Adding strength to his meaning-making are references to Petre Țuțea⁵³, Constantin Noica⁵⁴, and Mircea Vulcănescu⁵⁵ – three important Romanian philosophers turned political prisoners under the Communist regime. This narrative

⁵³ Petre Țuțea – Romanian philosopher. Spent 12 years in different Communist prisons.

⁵⁴ Constantin Noica – Romanian philosopher. Spent 6 years in the Jilava Communist prison.

⁵⁵ Mircea Vulcănescu – Romanian philosopher. Deceased in 1952 in the Aiud Communist prison after 6 years of imprisonment.

strength is achieved through the contrast between the corrupt personality of the former Communist cadres and ‘the straight spine of the Christian dignity’ characterizing former political prisoners such as Țuțea, Noica, and Vulcănescu. The repetition of one word – ‘truth’ – reveals it holds strong importance to Mr. Puric. In supporting his meaning-making, he feels the need to insert a Chinese philosophical analogy which directly touches upon fundamental existential pillars of the Romanian culture - the land and freedom – which have deep archaic and spiritual meanings attached. The land is perceived as the safe keeper of ancestors, heritage, and traditions, while land ownership is seen as the means to achieve worldly freedom. Truth and Freedom are the main drivers and ultimate life goals for Christian believers such as Mr. Puric. His Christian-driven attribution of meaning reveals Mr. Puric perceives the ‘straight spine and verticality of the Christian dignity’ characterizing the personality of former political prisoners as able to boost ‘Romania’s ability to recover’ from the ‘malignant’ effects of post-1989 purposeful attempts to distort national history:

‘A big shock came from the elite of traitor intellectuals after 1989 who developed a separatist societal speech and dilemmas about the recovery of the past. It was them more than the Securitate members who anesthetized Romania’s ability to recover. Under the pretext that the Communists covered and obscured, they worked towards a deconstruction of the history of Communism, as if this – and not the revealing of truth – was important. The focus should not have been on deconstructing what was already fake but on the confession of truth. This is how different histories on the debunking and desecration of history, the re-Romanization of Romania actually led to a dilution of memory. Since we do not have a present, they attacked the past. In a centuries-old Chinese war manual it is

mentioned that, if you want to destroy a people, all you must do is cut their roots from the ground and their view of the skies. So, the most dangerous thing that happened to Romania is the work of our post-1989 intellectuals and their conciliatory speech of taking a few good things from, let's say, Mircea Vulcănescu and throw the rest to the garbage bin. But there was nothing bad about Mircea Vulcănescu! [...] I have to repeat, this intellectuality is bought by an international occult pretending to be international and Christian but in fact being malignant. We do not have a Țuțea or Noica anymore; the new wave behaves on a radial symmetry like the jellyfish: they move according to where the meal is. They do not have the straight spine and verticality of the Christian dignity; they mime it. They write books on Church, but their purpose is to sell anything.'

Another theme Mr. Puric spends considerable time and detail narrating is the ontological transformation brought by the encounters with former political prisoners in his life. This is expressed in words such as 'shock', 'purifying', 'role models', 'alive', and 'awake'. Through repetition, the discouragement of aggressive and vengeful action towards former Communists appears as a strongly perceived effect to which Mr. Puric adds a metaphysical Christian meaning. To this effect, he adds concepts of 'eternity', 'memory', 'wisdom', 'gentleness' which he associates with a perceived superior civilization of the profound Romanian soul. To add historical and philosophical depth to his story, Mr. Puric feels the need to insert a quote by Aristotle. He also argues for the morally-regenerative importance of the former political detainees by placing them in the convulsive context of present-day Europe:

'The shock came after 1989 when I could get hold of books of prison memoirs and learn what has happened to our people. [...] Meeting them had a purifying effect. Just like a substance which purifies water. All the filth I may have accumulated on the way was gone. This happens when you meet 80 or 90-year old men who remained unstained after 15-20 years of Communist prison and thinks with an extraordinary youth and depth. One thing they passed on to me is the lack of aggressiveness towards their torturers. We are not talking about fatalism, but about Christian forgiveness. Meeting them is like physically touching profound Romania. It materializes something which seemed abstract. Just like Aristotle says: >>matter is made of palpable things, but also of temporal things like history<<. Meeting former prisoners enabled me to touch history. I touched the eternity, the dignity, the memory of our people, the Romanian way of being. They were telling me how members of rival political parties on the outside came together in prison. Same for religious denominations. A wisdom, a gentleness, a nature of a superior civilization. Our people have a superior civilization of the soul. In a civilization of material products, we may still be rather barbarian. In terms of the soul, our people have an unmatched touch. [...] This is what meeting the political prisoners taught me, to not seek vengeance. I never heard any of them having a radicalized speech on this topic. If anything, I found them indisposed by the Romanian elements which allowed the implementation of Communism. In a Europe which seems to be regressing, a Europe lying on a powder keg, these political prisoners remain role models. Memory has taught me to be awake and alive!'

To support this perceived ontological transformation, Mr. Puric symbolically contrasts instances of compassionate and forgiving behavior among former political prisoners to the suffering inflicted on them by the Communist authorities. His reference

to each political prisoner carrying his own Cross adds dramatic meanings to the narrative as it mirrors the Biblical episode of Jesus Christ carrying His own sacrificial Cross to the place of His Crucifixion. The repeated use of ‘God’ or ‘Cross’, and the emphasis on Compassion and Love – the most important values promoted by Christianity - reconfirm the profoundly Christian nature of Mr. Puric’s meaning-making process:

‘Gheorghe Jijie⁵⁶ – may God rest his soul – was telling me about his tortures in the Aiud prison. His cellmate – a Greek Catholic priest – was brought in with broken ribs and a crushed jaw after terrible beatings. There was also a Roman Catholic priest. Through the window, they could see a crow holding a chestnut in its beak. The crow got scared by the screams of pain coming from the prison and released the chestnut. That nut meant for them a meal at the Hilton! In a great synod, the Orthodox gave the chestnut to the Greek Catholic. Wherein this action lies God and the essence of the Romanian people! There was no intolerance among political prisoners. [...] Nicolae Purcărea⁵⁷ suffered so much! Still, he was like a light from which a sad gentleness seemed to radiate. There were almost 20 years of prison gathered within. I have never heard him or others like him speak badly of anyone. But I hear others, paid from public funds, instigating nowadays against this and that. The noble breed of our people is seen in people who suffered terribly and feel no resentment towards their aggressors. The aristocrat is not vengeful! They truly believed everything comes from God, and each of them carried his own Cross.’

⁵⁶ Gheorghe Jijie – Member of the anti-Communist resistance. Imprisoned for 13 years in different Communist prisons.

⁵⁷ Nicolae Purcărea - Member of the anti-Communist resistance. Imprisoned for 17 years in different prisons.

Another way in which he makes sense of the lack of vengeance towards Communist authorities is by bringing in the theme of justice in the context of the recent condemnation of the former commander of the Râmnicu Sărat Penitentiary to 20 years in prison. In so doing, he promotes the morally regenerative effect of such acts of condemnation of the past:

‘Another example is the recent arrest of Vişinescu which brings no satisfaction to former political prisoners. A moral public condemnation of the Communist past was needed.’

In the same line, he further details the ontological transformation towards kindness and compassion by inserting an analogy between the nature of the Romanian people and that of Prince Charming. In so doing, Mr. Puric argues for the profoundly moral regenerative role of compassionate behavior. The analogy employed critically reveals his meaning-making process on this topic is intimately connected to his childhood memories:

‘The Romanian people do not have a vocation for hatred. Prince Charming is born in our fairy tales for love, for an ontological reparation of the Being. He is not born for anti-Semitism, for hatred, for stealing. Degenerates are born for this, and all nations have degenerates. Criminal history is made by degenerates reaching power, while valuable people endure the degenerates’ actions. Memory has taught me not just to be tolerant, but deeply kind, not to have acts of arrogance in this limited life we have.’

One other means through which Mr. Puric adds weight and international importance to this Christian-driven transformational effect is by linking it to the name of Andrei Tarkovsky – one of the most important Soviet Russian movie director, and to the suffering of Jewish people under Nazi totalitarianism. The need to add a familial link to

this narrative exposes Mr. Puric's intimate identitarian connection with the theme of international suffering and resistance under totalitarianism:

'Tarkovsky mentioned he watched a movie on the execution of Jews by Nazis. What touched him deeply was the Jews digging their own grave. During the process, one Jew carefully packed his jacket as if he still needed it after execution. No one can still be anti-Semitic when seeing such a humane gesture. My uncle told me the story of his mum's brother who was in the military. Being allies of Nazi Germany, he was asked to execute some Jews somewhere in Russia. A young, blonde girl asked him to save her. A true Christian, he asked his German superior to spare her. His superior said they either release or execute all. They released all of them, based on which the German officer was executed while my relative had to run for hundreds of kilometers to save his life. This is the Romanian essence!'

When directly referring the Sighet Memorial, Mr. Puric confirms he visited it on several occasions, spoke at conferences, and acted in a theatre play held in the Memorial. Although praising its pioneering function, he is critical about the recent renovation and reinterpretation projects:

'The interpretation has, at some point, been a bit beautified. Maybe it would have been better to leave it as it was. The important thing is that we have it. The efforts of Ana Blandiana and Romulus Rusan are admirable.'

Another way he makes sense of the Sighet Memorial is by placing it in the context of contemporary societal discussions for the development of a museum about the history of the Communist regime in the capital city. In so doing, he calls for further memorial

initiatives focused on the victims of Communist totalitarianism. He emphasizes their educational purpose on young generations of Romanians if supported by a relevant educational curriculum:

'It is beneficial to have it, and there should be a network of such institutions all over the country! The information displayed at Sighet should be introduced in official school books. [...] A museum in Bucharest is needed so that young generations are aware of what Romania went through. If made, it should be further supported through the educational curriculum. Otherwise, it stays isolated. It is useful to talk to young people about the sacrifices made by former political prisoners.'

To make further sense of this educational function of memorial initiatives, Mr. Puric brings back into discussion the leitmotifs of national and international betrayal, and of the persistence of pre-1989 practices into post-1989 Romania. To this, he adds the idea of a purposeful distortion of history in schools, as suggested by references to 'hired to confuse', 'real version of history', and 'brainwashing of Romanians'. He also links this to another important theme of his meaning-making: the assumption of responsibility for one's actions. His emotional involvement is expressed in an imperative accusatory tone:

'Many of our historians are hired to confuse young minds. If the crimes are taught in schools, some people by default become responsible. This is not wanted! The heirs of those responsible are still in power! [...] The real version of history should be presented, starting with the betrayal of Romania by the Western powers and all the way to the post-1989 brainwashing of Romanians towards losing the national identity!'

In another moment of the interview, he details his perceived metaphysical nature – suggested by words such as ‘sacred’ and ‘confessor’ - of such memorial initiatives which actively enables the Romanian society to be morally regenerated through a reconnection with the past. Again, the theme of personal assumption of responsibility is brought into the discussion:

‘All that was anti-Bolshevik in this country becomes sacred with the passage of time. The moral responsibility belongs to those who introduced Communism to Romania and still refuse to admit it. Nowadays we are living through a process of retrieval of our past and our natural way of being. Memory is not passive and inactive, it activates! A confessor is not someone who just helps you remember the past, but someone who – through remembering you the past - determines you to act with strength and dignity. It is a potentiality of the past which enters its actualization. You bring it to life!’

Another means Mr. Puric employs for attributing meanings of importance to memorial initiatives is detailed narratives about his personal assumption of responsibility for initiating and getting involved in projects focused on the popularization and commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime. The choice of words such as ‘human conscience’, ‘moral conscience’, ‘soul hygiene’, ‘righteousness’, ‘honesty’, ‘faith’, and ‘thrill of being’ exposes the moral and existential regenerative role of educating young Romanians about the history of Communist repression. Intermingling such concepts with others such as ‘past’, ‘traditions’, ‘identity’, ‘martyrs’, ‘Church’, or ‘icon’ reinforces the profound Christian and traditionalist nature of Mr. Puric’s thinking and actions. So does the mentioning of Mihai Eminescu – colloquially known as the

national poet of Romania – whose writing was strongly rooted in Christianity and in the archaic thinking of Romania. Such statements reveal the perception of his work as an answer to a divine and ancestral calling:

'I did not get close to the victims as an actor, but as a human conscience. For me, theatre is a consequence of the moral conscience. I do not act or do something just for the sake of doing it. Taking action based on the shock of discovering the Romanian martyrs from Communist times was an act of moral and soul hygiene, righteousness and honesty. [...] When I started the Aiud project, I was accused of so many things. The hardest thing is being purged and accused by people fighting the same fight as you. [...] I decided to speak to young people about the victims of the Communist regime because they were unplugged from their past, faith, traditions, or role models so that they become easier to manipulate. Someone living in a perpetual present has no future. Inviting them to the depth of Romania gives them an identity, a thrill of being! Eminescu was talking about the necessity of education through Church. It is said that a mother looking at an icon will have beautiful babies. So, I am showing young Romanians the icon.'

Mr. Puric's profoundly Christian nature is ever-so-evident in a series of statements where he repeatedly connects 'faith' and 'God' to Romania's recovery and salvation. Again, his focus is on the moral regeneration of the Romanian society, as suggested by remarks such as: 'recover [...] through a positive condition of the soul' and 'reconditioning of the healthy societal tissue'. To add symbolic dramatism to his narrative, he inserts a Biblical analogy between personal faith and Noah's Ark, and calls for the

personal assumption of responsibility for achieving this moral and spiritual regeneration against ongoing historical vicissitudes:

'The only solution is faith which gives people strength. A Romanian peasant once told me: >>I do not just believe, I also have confidence in God!<<. We crush walls as we did for 2,000 years and let God do His job. If we take one step, He takes ten. We will not recover through doctrine, but through a positive condition of the soul which can only be achieved through faith. The reconditioning of the healthy societal tissue is done from person to person. Each of us should prepare a Noah's Ark in our souls, as the flood is getting closer. What needs to be saved this time is humans, animals were saved long ago. Man is drowning in a horrible history.'

- **Portrait Number 21: Mr. Tudor Gheorghe**

Relevance to Study: Leading Romanian artist and intellectual figure with projects focused on the memory of the victims of Communist totalitarianism.

An essential means Mr. Tudor Gheorghe employs to make sense of the topic at hand is childhood memories. In a contrasting meaning-making, he uses the words 'happy', 'good', and 'beautiful' to refer to his childhood before the Communists came to power, and concepts of 'disaster', 'rupture', and 'extraordinary effect' to describe his perception of his father's arrest and own educational struggle once the Communists seized power. This reveals a conscious and assumed ontological transformation. The fact that he

mentions the people in the Communist system who helped him despite his background as a child of a political prisoner critically shows Mr. Tudor Gheorghe does not maintain resentment or anger towards the Communists. This is reconfirmed by his serene and humorous narrative tone throughout the interview. His perception of those who helped him as a godsend, together with accounts of his father's role as a church singer, reveal the profoundly Christian nature of his sense-making. This is reinforced by his forgiving attitude towards those who imprisoned his father, as forgiveness is one of the fundamental values promoted by Christianity. Mr. Tudor Gheorghe's reference to Marin Sorescu⁵⁸ – as well as other writes in different moments of the interview – next to words such as 'elite' or 'intellectual' exposes an erudite personality which promotes the rule of the cultured:

'I had a happy childhood in my village. I was not privileged in any way. My father was part of the elite in the rural community as he was a church singer. As Sorescu says: >>he was the intellectual of the village<<. I had a very happy childhood since the collectivization and nationalization had not started yet. There were good and beautiful times. The disaster started soon after. The arrest of my dear father produced a rupture inside of me just as I was crossing from childhood into teenage. It had an extraordinary effect on me. Then life followed its course. I was the child of a political prisoner. This is an extraordinary thing. I was expelled from the schools in the Oltenia region, so I had to move to some aunts in Arad to finish my 9th year of education. After one year I returned to Craiova and managed to finish high school and be accepted at the Institute of Theatre

⁵⁸ Marin Sorescu - Romanian poet, novelist, and dramatist. Minister of Culture (1993-1995).

Studies in 1962. I had to lie that my mother – advised by a lawyer – divorced my dad. In the enrolment documents I had to write about my dad, so I said I had no clue about him and that he left us after divorcing my mum. I must mention one thing. You must be completely crazy to think those working for the Institute did not know my father was imprisoned. Later I found out this was a known fact. But they saw a talented child. There were also such people under Communism. Few, but God placed them in the right places for helping me.'

Other memories from his young formative years Mr. Tudor Gheorghe narrates are those linked to his father's liberation from prison. He feels the need to connection poems of former political prisoners heard from his father after his release from prison to the subsequent inclusion of such poems in a musical project Mr. Tudor Gheorghe dedicated to the former political detainees. This narrative link reconfirms the ontological transformation brought to his life by the intimate encounter with the universe of political imprisonment. This transformation is further suggested by the acknowledged change in the perception of poems written by former political prisoners from 'childish' to profound:

'My dad's liberation in 1964 also liberated me in a way. I graduated from the Institute of Theater Studies at the top of my class and returned to Craiova. I chose to come back to Craiova purposefully to make my dad happy. [...] Upon his return, my dad was telling me poems of Radu Gyr⁵⁹ and Nichifor Crainic⁶⁰, and I was telling him about Walt

⁵⁹ Radu Gyr – Romanian poet, journalist, and dramatist. Imprisoned for 16 years in different Communist prisons.

⁶⁰ Nichifor Crainic – Romanian writer and politician. Imprisoned for 15 years in the Aiud Prison under the Communist regime.

Whitman. My dad was not updated on the evolution of literature; he was still back in the days. He would not understand anything of modern poetry. Just like I found Gyr's poems to be childish. Only later did I manage to find the depths of Gyr's, Crainic's, or Ciurunga⁶¹'s poems. I then used them as working materials for my >>With Christ in the Cell<< project.'

His conscious and assumed ontological transformation and his profoundly Christian nature of meaning-making are confirmed by statements such as the one below. Mr. Tudor Gheorghe perceives his professional success as a result of answering a divine calling:

'This is the story: from happiness to complete suffering to professional accomplishment and to today's satisfaction of having lived through all of them. And I would most likely not be here today had I not lived through all of this. Maybe God wanted me to pass through these thresholds to become what I am today.'

Mr. Tudor Gheorghe's musical project 'With Christ in the Cell' is perceived and portrayed as the materialization of his deeply felt ontological transformation. It is where his personal memories of his young formative years and his Christian nature meet two other important themes of his meaning-making process: the need for young generations of Romanians to be educated about the history and values of the former political prisoners, and his personal assumption of responsibility for attempting such education in his chosen profession. The perceived impact of the Communist regime is expressed through the

⁶¹ Andrei Ciurunga – Romanian poet. Imprisoned for 10 years in different Communist prisons.

words ‘societal rupture’, while his emphasis on ‘the future of the nation’ suggests his belief in the regenerative role of providing youngsters historical education. Other means employed by Mr. Tudor Gheorghe to make sense of and add dramatism to this aspect are hypothetical assumptions and rhetorical questions:

‘>>With Christ in the Cell<< is realized as a personal recognition of the personal suffering of my dad and all of those who were imprisoned. I told myself this must be done to make them happy. I also wanted today’s generations to know what kind of poetry was written behind Communist bars. [...] What helped many prisoners resist was their belief in God. It had been inoculated in them during their formative school years. Most of those imprisoned were priests, intellectuals. That is where and when the societal rupture happened, and this is what young people – the future of this nation – must know. Had all those imprisoned been allowed to form young people and be their mentors, imagine how Romania would be today! [...] Where would we be had the Communists not come to power?!’

Having already detailed his familial suffering at the hands of the Communist authorities, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe feels the need to also narrate the issues he has personally faced because of his anti-Communist attitude. His statement reveals the existential importance he places on freedom of expression. This is presumed to hold deeper meanings for Mr. Tudor Gheorghe considering Freedom and Truth represent the core values and life goals for Christian believers. Mentioning the name of one of the most important Romanian writers – Ion Luca Caragiale – adds a unifying identitarian character to his story. The narrative contrast between his music being banned during the Communist

regime and being able to perform again after the 1989 Revolution exposes another aspect of his lifelong ontological transformation. This is reconfirmed by his choice of title for his first musical project after the change of regime – ‘Songs through a closed mouth’:

‘They completely banned my concert based on Caragiale’s work. Later, in 1986, they forbid me to perform again. They allowed me to perform until they realized I am concerned with Bessarabia, with the poetry of the prisons, and so on. I could only perform again after 1989. Then I had a project called >>Songs through a closed mouth<<, in which I included songs I could not perform during the Communist times.’

He brings together the themes of censorship and personal assumption of responsibility in the context of the premiere of his musical project dedicated to the former political prisoners and labeled ‘With Christ in the Cell’. In (dark) humor and sarcasm, he narrates the perceived success of his plans to defy those who wanted to censor this concert. Details of the choice of location and staff, and of the reaction of the invited political prisoners add strong meaning and dramatism to the narrative. Mr. Tudor Gheorghe’s strong emotional involvement in the story is expressed through his reference to the high level of emotion in the audience and through a series of exclamatory remarks whose peak of intensity is reached when he states that ‘[t]his is how I planned it! The authorities could not do anything to me due to such audiences!’. Pinpointing the presence of two important political leaders who suffered during the Communist regime in the audience – Corneliu

Coposu and Ion Rațiu⁶² – exposes a personality which prefers political movements focused on tradition and democracy:

‘Few people know, but I purposefully asked for the opening of this musical project to take place in the Culture House of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I asked the Minister for the permission to use fat and sweaty policemen as ushers. Their role was to take former political prisoners I invited to their seats. During the concert, I pretended to forget the lyrics so those in the audience could whisper them to me. Can you imagine the level of emotion? Former prisoners had come for the concert from all over Romania. When Ciurunga saw 800 people in the venue, he said with humor that I had gathered them in one place so that they can be arrested together. They could actually laugh about this! Coposu came, Rațiu came, so many! This is how I planned it! The authorities could not do anything to me due to such audiences!’

In the same line of the personal assumption of responsibility, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe speaks of another musical project called ‘Degeaba’ (‘To No End’) dedicated to both the former political prisoners and the victims of the 1989 Revolution. His choice of words such as ‘broken’, ‘altered’, ‘decayed’, ‘manipulated’, ‘scared’, and ‘purposefully forgotten’ describe his perception of the contemporary Romanian society under the influence of persistent elements and practices of the Communist regime which Mr Tudor Gheorghe labels as ‘leftovers’ or ‘reminiscences’. His reference to not caring about

⁶² Ion Rațiu – Important leader of the Romanian exile. In 1990, he became the vice-president of the Christian Democratic National Peasants’ Party. He supported the creation of the World Union of Free Romanians.

certain people's dislike of his message critically reveals a perceived and assumed mission in the name of Truth and Freedom. Mentioning his perception of a 'broken, altered, decayed' society exposes that one of the goals of this mission is the moral regeneration of the nation through the remembrance of those who chose suffering over giving up their values and freedoms. This goal and also his strong emotional involvement in the topic are expressed through the repetition of the imperative statement 'Do not forget!':

'>>To No End<< is tougher! It is my attempt at reconstructing and remembering of a short period of time. In this concert, we realize how fast we were broken, altered, decayed. Many may not like what they hear, but I do not care about such matters. Many do not know; many are manipulated. It is painful but true! [...] Today we have no more Communists in Romania, we have Communist leftovers. Reminiscences are found without a doubt! It will take generations to change this. [...] We forget too quickly! As a nation, we have not learned anything from the past! [...] Many are still scared of those times. Beyond all the atrocities which cannot be denied. They are purposefully forgotten, and that is why I try to bring them back in people's memory through my musical projects. The first part of the >>To No End<< project belongs to the victims of the Communist regime. Do not forget! Do not forget! Do not forget!'

The leitmotif of personal assumption of responsibility for societal change is brought in the discussion one more time and openly acknowledged in the context of future musical projects. The repetition of 'duty', 'patriotism', and 'awakening' reveals the perceived and intended nature of this assumed responsibility. Disclosing his current work on a musical project of controversial compositions reconfirms a personality which places

Truth and Freedom at its core. Mr. Tudor Gheorghe's emotional involvement in the topic and determination to overcome expected problems are expressed in a series of exclamatory remarks, including 'I must do it!':

'For me, fulfilling your duties as well as you can in your field is an act of patriotism. [...] I would not feel fulfilled if I stopped now. It is my duty as an individual who is fully aware of one's artistic capabilities and impact on people to keep on going! I do not have too many things left to do from a self-imposed cultural schedule. I am working on a musical project of national hymns from 1877 onwards, including controversial ones. I will have problems because of it, but I must do it! It will be a program for the national awakening of a disoriented generation. I want to awaken a feeling of real patriotism! To know why this country deserves to be loved! People suffered here; they were tormented, cried, but also did fantastic things! [...] I am looking forward to a national awakening!'

In different moments throughout the interview, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe makes sense to his perceived need for national awakening by providing societal flaws. His emphasis is on a contrasting duality of material progress and spiritual regress. He proposes the decreased morality to be the result of a scarcity of role models, but also of internal and external interest-driven individuals. Considering his narrative focus on representatives of the intellectual elite and his projects centered on the values promoted by the former political prisoners, it can be critically assumed Mr. Tudor Gheorghe perceives these two categories as role models based on which the moral regeneration of the Romanian society can be attempted. His intense emotional involvement in the topic is expressed in a series

of imperative remarks, rhetorical questions, and words such as ‘upset me’, ‘the hell with them’, ‘upsets me’, ‘destroyed’, and ‘disastrous’:

‘Many good things have been done after 1989. In terms of possessions, we are rather good. What upsets me is the shallow level of morality. The morality of this nation has been destroyed! The corruption and lack of infrastructure...the hell with them, we will improve this! But what do we do with the new generations of youngsters who do not have educational models? The educators formed in the Communist regime still had some knowledge, but the educational system post-1989 is disastrous! Tens of universities were built, but there are very few good educators left. [...] We should not be arrogant about our nationality. Who are we?! We are nothing! A nation unable to decide their own fate and receiving indications from foreigners! [...] We have no civic society. There are the petty interests of certain individuals calling themselves a civic society.’

In a different moment of the interview, he feels the need to bluntly confirm his lack of resentment towards the Communists despite the perceived suffering inflicted by them to him and his family. One way he explains this lack of resentment is through an assumed forward-looking attitude:

‘I try to maintain a certain objectivity in this life. I have no anger towards the suffering I have lived; I have anger towards the present-day state of affairs! [...] I am seriously disturbed by the fact that we always look behind! As we always look behind, we do not see what is coming in front of us, and we hit our heads against obstacles we could bypass with a forward-looking attitude.’

Another way he makes sense of this lack of resentment is by placing it in the context of the recent sentencing of the former Communist prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. While remembering his own emotions caused by his father's imprisonment by the Communist authorities, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe calls for a compassionate and symbolical sentencing of former prison authorities based on Christian values. Such an approach reconfirms a profoundly spiritual meaning and decision-making process since Compassion and Love for other beings are the central values promoted by the Christian belief:

'The supreme justice would have been to sentence him and let him free. He did these crimes; there are witnesses, he is guilty. Sentence him and send him home to suffer for what he has done! They must be forgiven, but we do not seem to employ Christian values towards them. Can you imagine what I felt when I received a letter saying >>the justice apologizes<< after they sentenced my dad to 22 years in prison and kicked us out of our house when I was 12?! >>The justice apologizes<<...and with this they closed the chapter!'

When referring purposefully to the Sighet Memorial Museum, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe mentions he visited it several times including its opening day. He praises its existence and reiterates – in an assertive tone - the leitmotif of personal and private assumption of responsibility for developing such projects. He promotes private initiative as the way to overcome the obstacles in the public system. In the same humorous narrative style, he makes sense of this aspect by depicting the societal ratio between highly intellectual and mediocre individuals, and their style of work:

'It is really good that we have it! Good for them, had they not assumed responsibility for developing it and had they waited for the state to develop such a memorial, we would still not have any all over Romania! All the important things in this country must be private initiatives! Unfortunately, when one has a very good idea, others set obstacles against its development. This is how the world is built. Around a person with a high intellectual capability and strength, you will find at least ten individuals of mediocre intellect. The one of high intellect fights and struggles alone, the mediocre ones shake hands and cooperate.'

Another way Mr. Tudor Gheorghe chooses to attribute meaning to the Sighet Memorial is by linking it to his familial suffering and to the Communist prison his father was imprisoned. This connection reveals an identitarian connection with the realm of Communist penitentiary structures while reconfirming his forgiving attitude towards the topic:

'I am not easily impressed with such venues, because I had suffering in my home. It is a matter of respect, but I do not have special emotions. I visited the cell my dad was locked in at the Aiud Penitentiary. I wanted to see how he lived.'

Lastly, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe makes sense of the investigated topic by briefly tackling the recent societal discussions about the need for developing a museum dedicated to the Communist regime in Bucharest. He openly supports such initiatives, but calls for a balanced approach to the interpretation:

'Such a museum is definitely needed. I see it as a museum of models. Models of what was built and what was destroyed during Communism.'

- **Portrait Number 22: Mr. Vasile Iusco**

Relevance to Study: Archpriest of the Greek-Catholic Church in Sighetu Marmăției.

Having been informed about the topic under investigation, Mr. Iusco begins his sense-making process with thorough accounts of his personal, educational and professional becoming. In the initial stage, he provides only two short statements of his life under the Communist regime. The considerable difference in detail between the narratives of life between and after the 1989 Revolution exposes a genuinely perceived ontological change brought about by the fall of the Communist regime. The fact that he sees himself as a ‘shepherd’ whose role is to look after a ‘flock’ of ‘souls’ suggests that he perceives this ontological transformation as an answer to a divine rather than a professional call. His statements of being born, educated and professing near Sighetu Marmăției reveal a strong and intimate connection with the place and its history:

‘I was born in Ieud, in the Maramureș County. I am 46. After the 1989 Revolution, the Greek-Catholic Church became legal again. The Theological Institute in Baia Mare was set up. I graduated from this institute in 1994. After graduation, I got married and became a priest. I was bound to activate in the parishes which had been closed down by the Communists. This meant I had to seek a flock; I was like a shepherd without a flock. I re-established a parish in Botiza. I stayed there for a little time, as I was soon sent to look after the Romanian Christians in Ukraine, close to the border with Romania. I stayed there for six years. The experience gained there helped me gain a PhD in History. On my return, I was appointed as a priest in Oncești, close to Sighet. Five years ago, I was

appointed archpriest in Sighet. This means I have to take care of 23 parishes. In Oncești I look after 50 families comprised of 135 souls. So, for the last 22 years, I have been a priest in the Greek-Catholic Church.'

If in the initial stage of the interview Mr. Iusco provides only brief narratives of his life during the Communist regime, he later depicts a detailed and intimate portrait of his familial sorrow before 1989. Having already mentioned his birthplace, he now connects this place to instances of anti-Communist resistance, suffering, and death. This narrative connection reveals a strong identitarian connection to the region rooted in bloodline experiences. One aspect he stresses is the inability to retrieve the body of his deceased grandfather. For Romanians in general and Christian Romanians in particular, funeral rituals have symbolical functions which allow the smooth passing of the soul into the afterlife. This is assumed to gain extra strength and meaning for Mr. Iusco considering he is a dedicated member of the clergy. To instances of anti-Communist bravery and resistance, he contrasts the brutality of the Communist authorities. He does this by providing vivid, intimate images of his grandfather's body buried in a mass grave and flattened by bulldozer:

'My grandfather Iusco Dumitru – father of six children – was part of a group of anti-Communist armed resistance in the Țibleș Mountains led by the Popșa Brothers. This group included people from Ieud and other neighboring villages. On 2-3 May 1949, the members of the Popșa group were surrounded in a house in Ieud. An armed conflict followed during which the leader of the group - Vasile Popșa - was killed while the others managed to escape. Two waves of arrests and interrogations followed. In October, my

grandfather was arrested among 167 others and sentenced to 16 years in prison. He was imprisoned in the Gherla Prison and passed away on 4 January 1951, most likely because of hunger and cold. We do not know the details because his death certificate only states >>deceased on 4 January 1951<<. The most painful aspect for my grandmother was not being able to get his body. All we know is that those who died in those days were buried in three separate mass graves and flattened by a bulldozer. My grandmother was left alone with six kids. Later, the kids had problems enrolling in school because of >>unhealthy origins<<. When my father's brother wanted to enroll in high-school, he declared that his uncle was his father. When my father wanted to join high-school, someone reported that he was the son of a political prisoner, and he could only join a professional school.'

To the stories of familial suffering, Mr. Iusco adds a thorough portrayal of the ordeal of the Greek-Catholic Church. He achieves this through a mixture of irony (the remark about the 'Russian-style democracy'), historical chronology, symbolical or contrasting references, and vivid images. The frequent mentioning of 'students', 'intellectuals', 'the oldest and most respected educational institutions', 'schools', 'socio-qualitative activity', or 'educational system' within a short period of time reveals his perception of the nature of the Romanian society in general and the Greek-Orthodox Church in particular before the Communist Party assumed power. The mentioning of Iuliu Maniu – one of the architects of the unification of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania in 1918 – adds symbolical strength to Mr. Iusco's meaning-making. To this image of pre-Communist Romania, he contrasts that of an illegal, oppressive and criminal Communist regime. The latter is achieved through vivid depictions of arbitrary

imprisonment and mass burials of political prisoners. Having already mentioned a similar fate for his grandfather, the mentioning of Greek-Catholic bishops thrown in mass graves reveals deep emotional involvement which is further amplified by the complex and meaning-infused funeral beliefs and rituals which form a strong component of the Romanian culture:

'After the 1946-elections forged by the Communists, the Russian-style democracy was established. Among the first political prisoners were many students or intellectuals. A virulent campaign against the Catholic Church began. The legislative measures set in place disabled the activity of the Catholic Church. The Church had been supporting the oldest and most respected educational institutions in Romania. The schools were nationalized, so was the wealth of the Church. The socio-qualitative activity of the Church was banned. The educational system was centralized and ideologized. Plus, there were direct pressures for the Greek-Catholic Church to be incorporated in the Orthodox Church. A wave of arresting bishops and priests followed. Among others, there was a political reason for this. The priests were involved in politics at that time, and they were the strongest supporters of Iuliu Maniu. The leaders of the Greek-Catholic Church were arrested in the night of 28-29 October 1948 and imprisoned in the Sighet Prison. Some of them were officially sentenced, while others were imprisoned until their demise without having been convicted of anything. Four of them died in Sighet: Valeriu Traian Frențiu, Ioan Suciu, Anton Durcovici, and Tit Liviu Chinezu. Their bodies were thrown in a mass grave on the outskirts of the town, in what became known as the Cemetery of the Paupers.'

Having already detailed his familial suffering during the Communist regime and the role of the 1989 Revolution in his life, Mr. Iusco brings these topics together in portraying the transformational role of former political prisoners on his personality. Although focusing on a physical change (his choice of profession), his sense-making is mostly metaphysical with references to emotions and values of divine nature. This deeply perceived ontological transformation is revealed through exclamatory statements and through adjectives such as ‘exceptional’, ‘extreme’, ‘powerful’, ‘truly awakening’, ‘tremendous’, or ‘authentic’. The analogy between the misery of the political prisoners and the suffering of Christ on the Cross gains strong meanings considering this Biblical episode is of fundamental importance for all Christians. It speaks of suffering, physical death, betrayal, but also about forgiveness and the resurrection of the spirit. In this symbolical context, the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ mirror the ordeal of many Romanians during the Communist regime and the regenerative role of the 1989 Revolution:

‘At the Revolution, I lived exceptional emotions of fear but also of extreme joy that something was finally changing. I was very confused about what I should do after the Revolution. One day I witnessed the preaching of an old Greek-Catholic priest who had been persecuted during the Communist regime. His words were so powerful that I immediately decided to join the Greek-Orthodox clergy...an effect no one else could have had on me! It was a true awakening moment! My choice is based on the role model that the respective priest ended up being. He had such a tremendous inner force when talking about the suffering of Christ on the Cross. No matter what you preach about, it will not persuade anyone if you do not add your personal experience to it. That is why I promised

myself to never talk to people based on a written note. I speak to people from my own understanding of the world. Otherwise, it is just empty talk. Of course, I can get ideas from different sources, but I always filter it through my personal set of values. I appreciate authentic spirits, not copy-paste ones.'

The transformational-educational role of endeavors focused on preserving the memory of the victims of the Communist regime becomes a leitmotif of Mr. Iusco's meaning-making. Having already depicted this role on a personal level, he goes on to develop it on a societal level. In one instance, he focuses on the impact of such memorial initiatives on young generations. When referring to the nature of the Communist regime Mr. Iusco employs words such as 'bent', 'crushed', 'suffered', and 'oppression'. The frequency of such notions reveals a deep emotional connection and possible residual feelings towards the topic. In contrast, he uses words such as 'resistance', 'never completely crushed', 'not bent over', and 'did not compromise' when referring to the Romanian nation. His imperative call against forgetting – as evident in the first exclamatory remark – is focused on the moral and identitarian regeneration of the people under the modeling influence of the political prisoners who did not compromise their values against diverse forms of oppression:

'We should never forget this painful period of our history! Forgetting enables people to repeat the same behaviors one way or another. The youth should know what their co-nationals – sometimes their own relatives – went through. It is important for them to know that the Romanian nation was bent by a political structure, but it was never completely crushed by it. There was an active resistance against the Communist oppression. This

movement of resistance draws the moral lesson that not everyone bent over to the oppressors. Their aspects must be known for the collective consciousness of the Romanian nation. Communism was and still is globally a form of oppression. Also, the Romanians must know that the Church and its representatives suffered during those times. Some compromised, others did not. We have no right to moral judgment as we have no idea what we would have done in those contexts. We have no moral right to judge, but we have the moral right to keep these memories alive. It is a way of showing new generations that not all behaviors are acceptable.'

In another instance, the transformational leitmotif takes on an active form when Mr. Iusco assumes responsibility for organizing ever-so-popular commemorative events. The fact that these events revolve around the Sighet Museum reveals a direct and sustained relationship between him and the institution. The choice of 'martyrs' when referring to those who succumbed in the Communist prisons exposes an emotional involvement touching on the divine:

'Starting in 2002, the Greek-Catholic Church felt the need to commemorate these martyrs by organizing a pilgrimage. Initially, it was a local one; then it spread to the Maramureş County and the entire country. In 2014 we had more than 4,500 participants. The pilgrimage starts in front of the Sighet Prison and ends at the Cemetery of the Paupers. This event is meant to remind people that Romania had suffered enormously during the Communist regime.'

At different moments throughout the interview, Mr. Iusco goes deeper in making sense of the life philosophy which represents the driving force behind his active

involvement in events dedicated to the remembrance of the victims of Communism. His statements revolve around two fundamental concepts of Christianity: Truth and Compassion. They are presumed to trigger deep meanings considering many of his close acquaintances preferred suffering during the Communist regime over giving up their values. They are also meaningfully connected to the aforementioned choice of profession where he perceives himself as a 'shepherd' of 'souls':

'When speaking Truth, you can say it as a slap in the face or in a more pleasant form. There seem to be some taboo topics about the past. However, I strongly believe these should be openly discussed because it is the only way to deal with and solve them. When we pass by a problem, we do not solve it, just postpone it. Moreover, postponing it can lead to its amplification. The amplified version can come back like a boomerang, and we may not be able to deal with the strength of its blow. This can crush someone. [...] Consciousness is like a magical globe, one you need to shape up and polish throughout your whole life. However, my impression is that many people do not work on it at all. [...] This should be the nature of human species, to continuously improve its condition towards the greater good and the better character. When you seek good for yourself, try to plant seeds of goodness around you and help them grow. You sow what you reap.'

Mr. Iusco's strong emotional involvement with the topic of Communist repression in general and with the Sighet Museum in particular is reinforced in instances when he purposefully refers to the museal interpretation. His direct emotional link with the site is evident when he connects his visiting experience with the images of close acquaintances among those of former political prisoners. In making sense of this experience, he employs

a mix of irony and contrasting statements in the context of Greek-Catholic nun imprisoned for possessing religious items. To her humble behavior, she opposes the brutality of the Communist authorities which he exemplifies in vivid terms. Again, he reinforces the transformational-educational role of such people over those who come in contact with their life stories:

'When I walk on the hallways of the Sighet Memorial I can see many faces of people I have known directly. My aunt, Sister Pelagia, is depicted in two photographs there. She was officially accused of helping the members of the resistance, but in fact, she was arrested for refusing to join the Orthodox Church. She was 16 when arrested and was convicted to six years in prison. The judge said a Bible and a rosary are the >>white weapons which she is using to kill the souls of the Communist youth<<. She spent five years in the Mislea Prison. During the interrogations, the Securitate officer hit her over the head and called her >>easy woman<< or >>slut<<. Her answer was prayer. These were humble people who did not want to stand out, but all were people of extraordinary personality and strength of character.'

His emotional involvement in the interpretation at the Sighet Memorial becomes negative when he details the presence of the Greek-Catholic Church among the museal themes. If in other moments throughout the interview Mr. Iusco has subtle and acid remarks about the institutional behavior of the Orthodox Church during the Communist regime, this time he is openly critical about this and about the museum developers' decision to allocate one section to all the cults. He achieves this through a series of blunt language, imperative statements, and accusations:

'The interpretation in the museum attempts to exemplify the realities of those times. Focusing on the Greek-Catholic Church, I have some complaints. Cells number 41 and 44 were used for imprisoning our bishops, and some have argued that the interpretation in these two cells should solely focus on the suffering of the Greek-Catholic Church. However, the developers chose to dedicate one cell to all the cults. And I find this unfair! The Greek-Catholic Church should have a separate section in this museum since its greatest people were imprisoned here. Some priests of our Church addressed official complaints to Mrs. Blandiana about this. Do not try to steal our memory! Do not try to mix us with other cults because there are enormous differences! The suffering was shared, but the approach to resistance and suffering is different. We cannot compare the Catholic Church who was eradicated with the Orthodox Church who negotiated with the authorities! Plus, no leaders of the Orthodox Church suffered in the Communist prisons. Orthodox priests and monks, yes, but not the leaders. Even this aspect can tell us a lot about the differences between the two. This is not an accusation, but an acknowledgment.'

Another topic Mr. Iusco tackles in his meaning-making is that of justice in the context of the recent sentence of former prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years in prison for crimes against humanity. He emphasizes the symbolical function of this judicial act towards the moral regeneration of the nation. His statements gain meaning considering Justice is a fundamental pillar of Christianity, while the emotional implication is presumed to be strong since Mr. Iusco is a member of the clergy whose close acquaintances suffered during the Communist regime:

'I am confident the human will be judged in both its physical and spiritual aspects. We do not have the ability to conduct the spiritual judgment. But the worldly justice has its purpose. The recent trial and sentence of Vişinescu is a positive thing as it brings justice to all the millions of oppressed Romanians. The earthly justice precedes the divine justice. When one is convicted for the atrocities one has committed, one should also prepare for the divine justice. Vişinescu's sentence is only the tip of the iceberg. However, I believe this should have been done 20 years ago. They began these trials nowadays only because most of the aggressors have already passed away.'

One recurring theme throughout Mr. Iusco's meaning-making is that of the decaying Romanian society closely linked to a highly corrupt political class in a modern capitalist society. The mention of the youth fleeing the country because of moral drainage gains meaning through his aforementioned call for the former political prisoners to be perceived as role models. He expresses his views through a mélange of blunt statements, accusations, and rhetorical questions. The referral to 'sin' and 'mortal' adds symbolical meaning through their Biblical connotations pointing to the decayed and transient human condition:

'The Romanian society is confused and unable to find its purpose. The youth are leaving the country. The political scene is disastrous; we have no politicians but opportunists. They keep changing political parties only hoping to add another digit to their bank accounts. [...] Being sinful is one thing, being corrupt is a completely different thing. To be sinful implies one is acknowledging his wrongdoings and working to improve his condition, being corrupt implies persevering in wrongdoings. [...] Sometimes I think they

forget they are mortals like the rest of us. [...] The youth are in great need of role models. They have almost none in recent history, and even the historical ones have recently been denigrated. What values can they report to?!'

Another theme is that of the continuation of the Communist regime and practices into the post-1989 Romanian society. In fact, Mr. Iusco points directly at Mr. Ion Iliescu – former member of the Communist Party who became the first president of Romania after 1989 – for explaining the contemporary societal moral decay. He expresses his resentment with Mr. Iliescu through the repetition of the pejorative term ‘comrade’ which is a form of address often associated with Communism. His strong emotional involvement is evident when using exclamatory remarks and when attaching his personal experience to the narration:

‘The one who is responsible for the moral decline of the Romanian society is comrade Ion Iliescu. After he called the miners to beat up the student protesters in June 1990, he had the nerve to declare that the miners showed civic and moral conduct. I was 20 years old and my whole inner world shattered when I heard this. No one using brute force against a fellow being can claim civil and moral conduct! I have always said that the first one who should have been trialed and sentenced is comrade Ion Iliescu. I keep calling him >>comrade<< because that is what he has always been. Even if he has had a change of outfit, hairstyle, and others, the essence has remained unchanged.’

Besides the remnants of the former Communist regime, Mr. Iusco links the moral decay and confusion of modern Romanian society to the involvement of external European factors. More precisely, he associates the diffusion of traditional values and

culture to a phenomenon characterizing contemporaneous Europe: political correctness. This gains meaning considering the fact Mr. Iusco has already promoted the former political prisoners as role models who chose suffering over resigning their culture and values:

‘We need a little verticality to not blindly accept laws and values imposed to us by foreign factors. We are not planets to align ourselves. We are an old people, with a certain culture and civilization. [...] We must understand our place in this Europe. The purpose of political correctness is the drainage of consciousness and personality.’

- **Portrait Number 23: Mr. Vasile Pop**

Relevance to Study: Archpriest of the Orthodox Church in Sighetu Marmăției.

Having been informed on the general topic of investigation, Mr. Pop begins his sense-making process by narrating aspects of his upbringing in the Maramureș County followed by his education in a leading Romanian institution for theological studies. The fact that he mentions such aspects at the beginning of his meaning-making reveals a strong physical and metaphysical identitarian connection with the Sighet region:

‘I have been the Orthodox archpriest in Sighet since 2000. I was born in 1957 and educated in Satu Mare. Later, I joined the Theological Institute in Sibiu.’

He continues making sense of the topic by mentioning the suffering of close personal acquaintances during the Communist regime. The emphasis on the persecution

of his professor from the Theological Institute exposes a perceived vocational and ontological transformation brought about by the presence of former political prisoners in his formative years. To the high intellectual and moral status of the political prisoners, he opposes the repressive nature of the Communist regime. The narrated link between the suffering of his professor and the museal interpretation at the Sighet Memorial further reveals a deeply felt direct connection with the site:

'I cannot emphasize anyone in my family to have suffered during the Communist regime. But I had people close to me who were persecuted. For example, my former professor of history at the Theological Institute – Ioan Glăjar – whose portrait I came across on the walls of the Sighet Memorial. We always wondered how come he was a professor although he had never obtained a PhD until we realized that he had been a political prisoner.'

The aforementioned transformational aspects and personal connection to the site and its victims are reinforced at other moments throughout the interview when Mr. Pop makes sense of the topic from his role as the Archpriest of the Orthodox Church in Sighetu Marmăției. The perceived ontological transformation from his interaction with the victims of the Communist regime is evident when he contrasts their resistance in the name of faith to the atrocities inflicted upon them by the authorities:

'In this part of the country, most of the priests arrested belonged to the Greek-Catholic Church. [...] We know of four great Orthodox theologians who were imprisoned in the Sighet Prison. [...] The stories of suffering affected my personality. Almost all of those

who survived the atrocities without giving up their values linked their resistance to their belief in God.'

The transformational function of the Sighet Memorial is a leitmotif Mr. Pop argues for on both personal and societal levels. He makes sense of the latter role by actively proposing the victims of the Communist regime as role models for young generations of Romanians:

'There is no doubt the youth should know this side of our history. Even Saint Paul said >>Remember your great people. Pay attention to how they accomplished their faith and follow the lessons of their life<<. Remembering our forefathers can shape present-day generations.'

One theme Mr. Pop feels the need to detail is that of justice in its physical and metaphysical understandings. In making sense of this theme, he brings back the transformational leitmotif by proposing the positive regenerative impact of judicial acts on a societal level in the context of the recent sentencing of the Communist prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu to 20 years behind bars for crimes against humanity. Having already depicted his professor at the Theological Institute as an intellectual and moral personality persecuted by the Communist authorities, Mr. Pop argues for justice by contrasting the perceived positive profile of the former victims to the low morals and education of the Communist authorities. The repetition of 'lie' adds meaning and intensity to his sense-making considering 'Truth' is a fundamental pillar of Orthodox Christianity. His metaphysical call for justice gains materiality through his direct mentioning of those exterminated in the name of the Communist ideology:

'Although the Bible calls for divine justice, I believe a worldly justice is definitely needed. Vişinescu is an old man, but his prison sentence can be seen as a signal for the re-education and healing of the Romanian society. Being trialed and convicted for his actions is an act of normality. They argue they only did their job, but they did a lot of excesses. These were uneducated people who got easily brainwashed. The whole Communism is a lie that not even those who brainwash others believe in. The ideology is a lie, while the dead it produced are the real thing.'

In different instances, Mr. Pop refers purposefully to the Sighet Museum. He reconfirms his personal and institutional connection with the site. What has been maintaining this strong and active relationship over time is the commemorative function of the museum. On top of the physical aspect of this commemorative role represented by the events, Mr. Pop accentuates its metaphysical – memorial and liturgical – aspect:

'We [the Orthodox Church in Sighetu Marmăției] have not particularly organized events for commemorating those who suffered here, but we actively took part in commemorative events organized by the Sighet Memorial. The victims are in our memories and prayers. We accepted all the Memorial authorities' invitations for commemorative masses or other similar events.'

When mentioning its physical features, he praises the quality and composed interpretation. When discussing its metaphysical meanings, he adjoins the aforementioned transformational leitmotif and commemorative role:

'I find the interpretation in the Sighet Museum to be of high quality and balanced. [...] The church seems to be well-represented. [...] The Sighet Museum is a place for

remembering those who chose to suffer for their beliefs and their values. It also has a formative purpose, teaching us to take more responsibility for our own individual actions.'

Mr. Pop rounds up the interview by contrasting the times during the Communist regime to the post-1989 period. The repetition of the word 'freedom' reveals the perceived essential change on both personal and societal levels. This gains further strength and meaning considering Freedom is the fundamental human condition and life goal for any Orthodox Christian:

'Of course, there is more freedom of expression and freedom of behavior, but some of these freedoms were poorly interpreted and adopted.'

- **Portrait Number 24: The Visitor (collective character)**

Relevance to Study: Opinion books of the Sighet Memorial Museum detail visitors' experience with the museum interpretation.

One major theme of The Visitor's meaning-making process is the personal and familial suffering in the Communist prisons and under the Communist regime. The aspect of personal experience is made sense of through words such as 'suffering', 'scarred by fear', 'repression', 'hideous regime', and 'destroyed many of us'. References to 'compassion', 'pray', 'God' and 'souls' expose a meaning-making process rooted in Christian belief:

'With deep compassion from a former political prisoner 1958-1964. He who ate from the bowl of a political prisoner knows what suffering is. My whole life as a political prisoner was suffering!!!'

'My whole childhood was scarred by fear!'

'Visiting this museum impressed me because I also lived this Communist repression which is still grinding up our souls. I pray for those who suffered for our future.'

'May God forgive them and rest their souls. Honor to those who opposed this hideous regime which destroyed many of us.'

In the same line, The Visitor speaks of the experience of having had a parent imprisoned in the Sighet Penitentiary. Such statements reveal an identitarian connection between some visitors and the Sighet Memorial Museum rooted in their need to suture their own identity to their parents' experience of imprisonment. The strong emotional impact is expressed through words such as 'strong emotion', 'impressive', 'special', and 'touching', and through exclamatory remarks such as 'He is forever in our hearts!':

'I came with strong emotion. My father was a political prisoner and he was also imprisoned in Sighet. It is very impressive to see this place in person.'

'It was special seeing my parents in the photos on the memorial walls.'

'Visiting this museum, I remember the image of my father who spent four years and six months in the harsh and tragic torments of this prison.'

'I am trying to relive my father's experiences while imprisoned here in '48-'49. It is touching for a daughter to visit her father's places of torment.'

'On the walls of this museum, I found the portrait of my father who was sentenced to life imprisonment. He is forever in our hearts!'

In other instances, The Visitor connects the visit to the Sighet Memorial Museum to parents' imprisonment in other political prisons of the Communist regime. This reinforces the identitarian aspect of the visiting experience discussed above. The high emotional loading is expressed through references to a wide variety of reactions, from admiration, gratitude, respect, resistance, pride to bitterness, pain, and blunt hatred:

'Just like people cannot forget and ignore their origins, we – the heirs of political prisoners – search for the origins of their pains. My father was arrested at 19. His liberation was like a second birth.'

'I leave with a bitter taste caused by the actions of the Communist regime. I am familiar with many of these actions from my family as my father lived the horrors of the Communist dungeons.'

'I am the daughter and heir of political prisoners. I only know what they could tell us in those times...the rest is silence and pain.'

'I am deeply impressed. I remembered my father and grandfather who were imprisoned because they dared to believe in their dream.'

'Visiting this prison, I remembered the stories of my father who was a member of an anti-Communist partisan group.'

'Charged with emotion, tears, and respect I came here to show my gratitude to the heroes of the Romanian nation which includes my own family. My uncles and father were imprisoned, suffered but came out victorious. I am proud of them and my nation.'

'My father, my whole family experienced these sufferings. Communism and its supporters are the only things I will hate until I die!'

The Visitor chooses to add further meaning to this theme by expanding the array of familial political imprisonment. The narrative connection between visiting the Sighet Memorial Museum and images of family members and close acquaintances imprisoned in Sighet and other political prisons strengthens the identitarian link between visitors and the site previously discussed. Expressed emotional reactions range from admiration, compassion, and pride to pain and calls for vengeance. In some instances, The Visitor chooses to attribute meaning to this theme by providing intimate and emotional depictions of the inner experience such as 'I miss you. I will always love you, my dear grandpa.' This theme of personal and familial repression is critically assumed to hold deep meanings, considering Family is one of the fundamental pillars of the archaic Romanian lifestyle with strong symbols and rites attached. Another fundamental pillar of the Romanian lifestyle adding metaphysical meanings to The Visitor's meaning-making process is Christianity, as suggested by the frequent references to 'God', 'soul', 'faith', and 'pray':

'For my parents' brothers and sisters who suffered in this prison for many years. For my neighbors who fought in the mountains. My soul trembles and I hope I will see the day when they will be avenged.'

'I found the photo of my grandfather who died in the Canal labor camp on the walls of the Sighet Memorial.'

'Very impressive. A relative of my grandfather died in this prison. May God rest all of them.'

'In the memory of my grandfather who was imprisoned between these walls. The villains forgot one thing: the soul and faith cannot be chained or locked behind bars.'

'Passing through Sighet, I visited the place where many of my friends and colleagues were imprisoned. I was deeply impressed to see the living conditions inside the prison.'

'I miss you. I will always love you, my dear grandpa.'

'I searched for my uncle on the walls of the Sighet Memorial. He was a political prisoner. All Romanians should visit this museum.'

'It is the 10th time when I visit this memorial of pain, of trauma, of the history of my people. My grandfather's brother was imprisoned here. Proud of Sighet. Proud of History.'

Linked to these narratives of personal and familial suffering is the theme of the political imprisonment in the Sighet Prison of the intellectual, political, and spiritual elite of Romania. The Visitor attributes meaning to the perceived profile of the former political prisoners through labels such as 'the Romanian intellectuality', 'the personalities of Romania', 'the best people of this / our nation', 'known figures of our glorious past', 'extremely valuable people', 'everything Romania held valuable', 'the most important political and cultural figures of our nation', and 'our political and spiritual elite'. Adding dramatism and meaning to the sense-making contrast is the narrative contrast between

this profile of the former political prisoners and the treatment they were subjected to, as expressed through words such as ‘ordeal’, ‘slaughtered’, ‘mass grave’, ‘exterminated’, ‘tragic end’, ‘calamities’, ‘death’, ‘decaying, torturing, and killing’, and ‘suffered and died’. The Visitor also attributes meaning to this theme by advancing different identitarian labels for the Sighet Memorial Museum, such as ‘place of ordeal’, ‘human abattoir’, ‘mass grave of the Romanian intellectuals’, ‘lesson for future generations’, ‘bastion of the fight against totalitarianism and political barbarism’, ‘home of our nation’s martyrs’, ‘place of terror’, and ‘holy place’. The frequent references to ‘God’, ‘soul’, ‘faith’, ‘prayed’, ‘church’, ‘Christian spirit’, ‘martyrs’, and ‘holy place’ reconfirms Christianity as a fundamental pillar of The Visitor’s meaning-making process:

‘We thank God that we managed to visit this place of ordeal for the Romanian intellectuality.’

‘This place is a human abattoir where the personalities of Romania were slaughtered.’

‘Visiting this mass grave of the Romanian intellectuals I am left with a strong pain in my soul. May God forgive their souls! Sincere congratulations to those who work here to leave a memory for future generations.’

‘I was deeply touched while visiting this penitentiary where the best people of this nation were exterminated. May this place become a lesson for future generations.’

‘With unimaginable emotion, I read and saw known figures of our glorious past, who met their tragic end for their faith and loyalty. With tears, we commemorated and prayed for all the sons of our church and nation.’

'I visited a bastion of the fight against totalitarianism and political barbarism. The patriotism and Christian spirit of the best people of our nation who sacrificed in this place is impressive!'

'Visiting this home of our nation's martyrs we must be aware of the calamities produced by dictatorships. All people should regret the death of extremely valuable people and do whatever they can for such aberrations to never happen again! Peace to the martyrs!'

'A place for the decaying, torturing, and killing of everything Romania held valuable: the intellectuality, the mind, the thinking spirit, this elite who did not accept the ideas of Communism. Eternal glory to those who were exterminated in this place of terror, a holy place which all Romanians should visit.'

'We came from Braşov to say a prayer and commemorate the victims of this hideous prison where the most important political and cultural figures of our nation suffered and died. I shed a hot tear in their memory. Let us continue their fight so such infamous actions will never happen again.'

'Dear God, we could have never imagined the horrors people with no love of the nation and faith were able to commit! They destroyed our political and spiritual elite who would have placed modern Romania among the civilized nations of the world.'

In some instances, the suffering rather than the people who endured it becomes The Visitor's narrative focus. In these cases, The Visitor tends to suture his/her own suffering to the suffering on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum. This identitarian connection is expressed either explicitly through references to acknowledged reactions caused by the interaction with the museal interpretation – such as 'I would have screamed

with pain’, ‘increased the pain within me’, ‘soul gets heavier’, ‘[i]t becomes harder to smile’, ‘I had goosebumps’, and ‘my soul was ravished’ – or implicitly through short imperative statements, such as the first two below:

‘Pain! Suffering! Poor people!’

‘Terror! Terror! Terror!’

‘Had I been alone while visiting this museum I would have screamed with pain.’

‘This visit increased the pain within me for the suffering of our people.’

‘Your soul gets heavier seeing the suffering inflicted on our people. It becomes harder to smile.’

‘I had goosebumps visiting this memorial of suffering.’

‘My soul was ravished while visiting this space of Romanian suffering.’

In other instances, The Visitor makes sense of the visiting experience at the Sighet Memorial Museum by describing the reactions triggered by the interaction with the museal interpretation. One type of reaction is expressed in words such as ‘cry’, ‘tear’, ‘sigh’ and their derivatives:

‘Here I sat down and cried.’

‘A deaf pain floods our hearts and our eyes are on the verge of tearing.’

‘No words, just a prolonged sigh...!!!’

‘Yes, I cried here many times. I thank those who gave me this opportunity.’

'I cried. Because we have forgotten about the pain and sacrifice of previous generations.'

'Tears and gratitude for our heroes.'

'Here you find real history. You feel it, it touches you! And you cry, you cry...'

Another type of narrated reaction is a feeling of reverence for the victims of Communist political repression. The Visitor usually makes sense of this aspect through words such as 'respect', 'honor', 'love', and 'homage'. To add further meaning and dramatism to the narrative, The Visitor sometimes adjoins this perceived feeling of admiration to emotional reactions of 'regret' and 'shame':

'We are too small compared to YOUR SACRIFICE. May God rest your souls! RESPECT and HONOR!'

'Respect to those who suffered for this nation.'

'A pious homage, warm thanks, and a tear on their unknown grave.'

'Love and respect for their courage.'

'Pious homage to those who fought for the salvation of the Romanian nation. Nothing and no one will ever erase their memory from our souls.'

'May God forgive them!! Honor to them! Shame on those who tortured others, may their souls roam in eternal restlessness and never be accepted into the Heavens.'

'I was impressed. I had a feeling of respect and shame that such things could happen in Romania.'

'With respect, I entered this cathedral of death which is shameful for the Romanian nation.'

'Regret and respect for everything that happened here.'

'Eternal regret and homage. A page of history written in blood.'

Other frequently mentioned reactions caused by the interaction with the interpretation on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum are those of strong ache and sorrow. These feelings are expressed through words such as 'sad(ness)', 'pain', and 'wound'. In some cases, The Visitor feels the need to add further meaning and dramatism to the narrative by contrasting the feeling of sorrow to the happiness of not living in totalitarian times anymore:

'My soul and thought are too sad to describe my experience while visiting this museum.'

'Beautiful, but very sad!'

'I have pain in my soul, but also happiness that those times are gone.'

'A place of deep sadness and loaded with history. I reflected a lot in this place.'

'A wound in our peoples' heart.'

'This wound hurts...I can feel the suffering, desperation, and hopelessness.'

In a similar tone, The Visitor speaks of reactions caused by the realization that the Communist repression was caused by people to people and, especially, by Romanian to Romanian. This repression is suggested by words such as 'chained', 'punish' and frequent references to 'pain' and 'suffering'. The type of reaction caused by this realization is

expressed in words and remarks such as ‘sadder’, ‘painful and terrifying’, ‘shocked’, ‘shame’, ‘shiver’, and ‘unfair’. One means employed by The Visitor to attribute meaning to this aspect is rhetorical questions:

‘There is nothing sadder than being chained by your brothers in your own country.’

‘It is painful and terrifying to see what some Romanians did to real heroes of their own nation.’

‘I could never imagine a human can inflict such suffering through torture to other humans.’

‘We are shocked to see what people can do to other people.’

‘Too much pain and suffering gathered in one place! It is a shame there were people capable of destroying the lives and ideals of so many of their fellow humans. It is unfair.’

‘A shiver took over my body while visiting the cells. I wondered how people could punish their fellow beings so terribly.’

‘So much pain and suffering linger in this space. You must ask yourself: how could Romanians do this to their fellow Romanians?’

‘How and why can someone inflict such pain on fellow humans?! No one deserves to live through such suffering.’

Another recurrent reaction expressed by The Visitor is that of appreciation for the developers of the Sighet Memorial Museum. This feeling is expressed through congratulatory remarks, words such as ‘impressive’ and ‘impressed’, and the invocation

of divine protection. The Visitor feels the need to add further meaning to the narrative by mentioning the perceived positive functions of the developers' museal initiative, such as 'showing future generations this genocide', 'refreshing the memory of the Romanian nation', 'keeping alive the memory of the victims', and 'clean this shame and ease the pains'. Additional dramatism is achieved through the labeling of the former Sighet Prison as a 'cathedral of death' and 'Hell of suffering':

'With respect, I entered this cathedral of death which is shameful for the Romanian nation. I congratulate those who initiated this project for showing future generations this genocide of the Romanian intellectuals.'

'The activity of refreshing the memory of the Romanian nation is impressive. Deep respect and admiration for the real martyrs of the Romanian nation.'

'Long live all those who enter this wonderful work of art.'

'This place is as real as it is sad. Congratulations for keeping alive the memory of the victims.'

'Very impressed by what I have seen in this Hell of suffering. May God help those who are trying to clean this shame and ease the pains of those who suffered.'

One other type of emotional reaction frequently mentioned is a call for God to allow the smooth and peaceful passage of the souls of those who suffered in the Sighet Prison into the Heavens, as suggested by the frequent repetition of 'May God forgive' and 'May God rest'. To add meaning and dramatism to this divine invocation, The Visitor

tends to input words which described the perceived fate of the political prisoners such as ‘Hell’, ‘horrible’, ‘terrifying’, ‘terror’, ‘died’ and ‘death’:

‘God, take these peoples’ souls to the Heavens because Sighet was their Hell!’

‘May God forgive the souls of those who died in this prison.’

‘May God forgive their souls! Horrible, terrifying, but true. Overwhelmed with sadness!’

‘May God forgive them, and may our sighs and regrets comfort them beyond death.’

‘May God rest in His kingdom all those who suffered in this place of terror.’

‘May their souls rest in peace!’

In the same line of the reactions stirred by the interaction with the interpretation displayed at the Sighet Memorial Museum, another major theme of The Visitor’s meaning-making process is introduced: the *in situ* importance of the site. One way The Visitor attributes meaning to this theme is by attempting to imagine oneself in the living conditions of the political prisoners. Acknowledged emotional reactions are expressed through words such as ‘restlessness’, ‘deeply moved’, ‘terrifying’, and ‘shivers’. Another way of adding meaning and dramatism to the narrative is by contrasting the imagined prison conditions to the reality on display:

‘When entering the Sighet Memorial a feeling of restlessness takes over your entire soul. I can imagine how living inside these cells was, I can imagine the prisoners and the authorities.’

'Deeply moved thinking of what those imprisoned here must have felt and endured day and night.'

'Every second spent in this museum gave me shivers thinking about those who lived and died here.'

'I would not last for one day in these conditions.'

'It is terrifying to enter this place and imagine all the gates closing behind you for years and years to come.'

'From the entrance, my body shivers with a strange emotion realizing I have entered through the place many of those who were imprisoned here never had the chance to exit.'

'No matter how imaginative one may be, he cannot understand until he sees with his own eyes.'

'Listening on the radio, watching on TV or reading in newspapers is completely different from seeing with your own eyes this place of suffering and martyrdom of fellow humans.'

The most popular means of attributing meaning to the *in situ* importance of the Sighet Memorial Museum are references to the walls of the former Sighet Prison as the keepers of its inmates' memory and hardships. This is expressed through the frequent association between these walls and words such as '(terrible) suffering', 'pain', 'tormented and tortured souls', 'brutally broken lives', and 'death'. The perceived persistence of these experiential aspects of imprisonment within and inside the walls of the Sighet Memorial Museum is expressed through remarks such as 'still live inside these walls', 'still cling onto the walls', 'still lingers in these walls', 'confessed by these walls',

‘walls are soaked’, ‘gathered inside these walls’, and ‘keeps between its cold walls’. In other cases, The Visitor attributes meaning to this aspect by metaphorically stating the potential of the walls to tell a ‘terrifying story’ and ‘the naked truth’:

‘The eternal remembrance of those who still live inside these walls.’

‘Very strong impression. The terrible suffering seems to still cling onto the walls.’

‘I felt the pain which still lingers in these walls.’

‘Visiting this place helps us purify our thoughts and conscience. All the suffering confessed by these walls demonstrate the good aspects of our people: its dignity and strength. Eternal gratitude!’

‘Visiting this place, I felt the silent pain of so many souls who suffered inside the walls of this prison.’

‘The walls are soaked in pain and suffering, but also in hope and belief in God.’

‘How much suffering and death are gathered inside these walls!!!?? I was impressed to tears.’

‘A political prison keeps between its cold walls the suffering of those imprisoned.’

‘The Memorial of Suffering...steps lost in non-existence, tormented and tortured souls, brutally broken lives in the so-called >>Romanian Gulag<<. If these walls could speak, they would tell a terrifying story! May God rest their souls!’

‘If only these walls could speak, they could tell us the naked truth.’

In other instances, The Visitor attributes meaning to the *in situ* importance of the Sighet Memorial Museum through statements which add palpable features to the experiential narrative. This is expressed in audible, olfactory, and tangible remarks such as ‘atmosphere charged with the moans of the prisoners’, ‘screams of pain can be heard’, ‘still smell the suffering’, ‘heavier soul than the air the prisoners were breathing’, and ‘[i]t is like stepping on bones’:

‘I knew it was terrible, but now I felt the atmosphere charged with the moans of the prisoners.’

‘In each corner of this prison screams of pain can be heard.’

‘You can still smell the suffering.’

‘We leave this place with a heavier soul than the air the prisoners were breathing here!!!’

‘Tragic, shocking, sinister, grim. It is like reliving their experience. It is like stepping on bones.’

As the meaning-making process unfold, the museum interpretation in itself becomes a major narrative theme. On frequent occasions, The Visitor feels the need to praise the quality of the interpretation on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum. This perception is expressed through words such as ‘elaborate’, ‘dedication’, ‘impressed by the organization’, ‘very well developed/documented /planned’, ‘beautifully made’, ‘plentiful’, and ‘logical’. The Visitor also attributes meaning to this aspect by stating reactions stirred by such a qualitative interpretive display, such as ‘touching and shocking’, ‘impressed’, ‘amazed’, ‘Respect!’, and ‘Thank you...!’:

'The presentation of these painful events is very touching and shocking. One can see the elaborate work and the dedication to developing this complex project.'

'I was impressed by the organization of this museum and how its components and items reveal the real torments of those who sacrificed themselves for us.'

'This museum is very well developed.'

'Very well documented. We need information!'

'This memorial is very well planned. Respect!'

'The structure and thematic organization are beautifully made.'

'I am amazed by this fantastic lesson of contemporary history. Plentiful information, logical organization of information. Thank you for the beautiful lesson of history and the painful awakening from the sleep of transition!'

Sometimes, The Visitor focuses his praise on the renovation works which took place at the Sighet Memorial Museum. The perception of these works is expressed in words such as 'happy', 'respect', and 'gratitude':

'I am happy to be back here and see the changes, renovations, and investments.'

'Respect to those who reconditioned this building.'

'Gratitude to those who recreated this place.'

'Respect for those who came up with the initiative of reconstructing this place of terror.'

In other instances, the museum interpretation in general and the renovation works in particular become a reason of discontent for The Visitor. This perception is expressed

through words and remarks such as ‘I felt almost nothing, and I could not understand much’, ‘not fair’, ‘essence [...] was lost’, ‘disappointed’, ‘disgust’, ‘boring’, and ‘confusing’. Most of these opinions gain strength and meaning through their contrast to the theme of the *in situ* importance of the Sighet Memorial Museum previously discussed:

‘I felt almost nothing, and I could not understand much. Why has this place been renovated? Why have you not left it as it was when the prisoners were here? This is not fair to those who died here.’

‘The essence of this place was lost because of aesthetic reasons.’

‘It would have been better for the prison not to be renovated. It looks too new.’

‘I visited the Sighet prison, and I am disappointed by the >>shiny<< look of the place. I cannot write because of my disgust.’

‘It was interesting, but a bit boring.’

‘I would have liked the museum to be more interactive and better organized. The visiting sequence is confusing.’

Another important theme of The Visitor’s meaning-making process is a strong feeling of surprise about the information displayed at the Sighet Memorial Museum. This feeling is expressed through words such as ‘stupefied’, ‘unbelievable’, and ‘unimaginable’, and through statements such as ‘I never believed’, and ‘I/we could have never imagined’. The emotional involvement in this theme is suggested by a generally imperative tone:

'Impressive! I heard about the prison, but I never believed something like this could happen in the 20th century.'

'I am stupefied by everything I have seen in this museum of sadness. Although born around here, I could have never imagined such crimes and horrendous actions were committed here. I am ashamed!'

'Unbelievable!'

'Terrifying! It is unimaginable these things really happened!'

'I could have never believed things like the ones I saw today could ever happen in Romania. Communism transformed the ideals used to seduce people into an elaborated Holocaust. We bring an homage to those who gave their life for our nation.'

'Sad, but true. We saw things we could have never imagined. I wonder why.'

Linked to the theme of surprise with the information displayed is the theme of purposeful attempts to hide and distort the history of Communist political repression. The latter is attributed meaning through statements such as '[w]e did not know this history', 'we were taught only lies', 'remain unknown', and 'we knew nothing about', and through the recurrent references to the inexistence of this history in school history books. Further meaning and strength are added through the narrative contrast between this inexistence and the perceived nature of the historical interpretation displayed at the Sighet Memorial Museum expressed through the frequent repetition of 'truth' and 'real (lesson in) history'. Through the filter of Christianity previously discussed, this focus on truth is presumed to

hold deeper meanings considering Truth is a fundamental experiential value for Christian believers:

'This was the truth lived by the great political figures of this nation. We did not know this history before because of those who wanted their identities to remain unknown.'

'Before we were taught only lies. We learned the truth by visiting the former Sighet penitentiary!'

'Terribly moved by the cruel truth of times we knew nothing about.'

'Students have almost nothing about the real suffering caused by Communism in their school curriculum.'

'I was deeply impressed with the TRUTH presented and I propose the truth of the ATROCITIES committed by the COMMUNIST regime to be included in the school history books.'

'The museum is a real lesson of history which should finally be included in the school history books so that people can know Truth.'

'You have given us a part of history we were never taught in school. For this, we thank you.'

'Spectacular! A real lesson of history which is not taught in schools!'

Such purposeful attempts to conceal the history of Communist repression is linked to another major theme of The Visitor's sense-making process: the effects of the repressive Communist administration on the contemporary Romanian society. A

perceived negative situation of present-day Romania is linked to the nature of the Communist regime which is attributed meaning through words such as ‘crime’, ‘disaster’, ‘atheism’, ‘horrible political regime’, ‘blood’, ‘suffered’, and ‘died’:

‘Those not knowing what happened in this prison will never know the nature of the Communist regime and will never understand why Romania is in a disastrous economic situation at present. Had the Communists not come to power, we would be among the European nations with civilized life. May we never forget those who opposed crime, disaster, and atheism. Congratulations to those who developed this museum.’

‘Visiting this prison, I realized that the situation of today’s Romania is a consequence of that horrible political regime. May God rest the souls of those who suffered and lost their lives in this prison!’

‘Today’s Romania is yesterday’s Romania soaked in blood!’

‘After ’89 there is no more real politics in our country. The real politicians lived, suffered and died in this place of death. May God offer them peace no matter where they are.’

The Visitor feels the need to go deeper in making sense of the effects of the Communist repression on the present-day Romanian society by linking the hardships of the political prisoners – expressed through remarks such as ‘martyrs fought for causes’, ‘people died for’, ‘suffering endured’, and ‘sacrifice’ - to the contemporary political class. The perceived corrupt, materialistic, and interest-driven nature of this political class is attributed meaning through words and statements such as ‘rats’, ‘thieves’, ‘robbed’, ‘greed’, ‘illiterate’, ‘no present-day politician can lead to completion’, and ‘villas, cars, and children with diplomas gained overnight’. The emotional involvement in this aspect

is revealed through concepts such as '[t]oo bad', 'unfortunately', 'deeply impressed', and through the mix of imperative remarks and rhetorical questions:

'Too bad these martyrs fought for causes which, unfortunately, no present-day politician can lead to completion.'

'People, people, people! Wake up! What have these people died for? So you can have villas, cars, and children with diplomas gained overnight? So that illiterate people can rule this nation? Shame!'

'I am deeply impressed to see the suffering endured by our predecessors, and it makes me wonder: what was their sacrifice for? For a gang of rats and thieves who are nowadays ruling the nation??? Gratitude for those who decided to make this place accessible to visitors.'

'We believe it is absolutely necessary to invent a similar prison for today's politicians who robbed Romania with their deeds and greed.'

In the same line, The Visitor connects this economic and political situation to the continuation of individuals and practices from the former Communist repressive apparatus in the post-1989 Romanian society. This persistence is attributed meaning through words and remarks such as 'heirs of the Communists', 'Communism still lingers [...] camouflaged', 'coup d'état organized by the second tier of the Communist Party', 'still in power', 'slaves with Bolshevik mentalities', and 'crypto-communist democracy'. In other cases, The Visitor makes sense of this perceived continuity by pinpointing the Social Democrat Party and former president Ion Iliescu as the *de facto* continuators of the Communist regime. Sarcasm is another means used for attributing meaning to this aspect,

as seen in the statement ‘I believe all Romanians have tasted the benefits of our good friend from the East’:

‘Visiting this political prison and horrors one shudders and asks himself how some people can today support the heirs of the Communists.’

‘People, pay attention! Communism still lingers in Romania camouflaged in the colors of the Social Democrat Party. Wake up before it is too late!’

‘We keep wondering why 25 years after the coup d’état organized by the second tier of the Communist Party led by Iliescu our nation is still struggling in misery. The answer is here: the entire elite of the nation was destroyed by the Communists. The power was obtained by usurpers with no belief in God and only interested in getting rich.’

‘It is painful to see the extermination of the elites. Let’s not forget those who committed the atrocities are still in power.’

‘Terrifying and paradoxical: the heirs of the Communists and still ruling and robbing this nation.’

‘When will our people get rid of the slaves with Bolshevik mentalities? How long will we still endure this crypto-communist democracy? I believe all Romanians have tasted the benefits of our good friend from the East.’

Another theme introduced by The Visitor to make sense of the visiting experience at the Sighet Memorial Museum is the importance of never forgetting the history of the Communist repression. This perceived importance is attributed meaning by emphasizing

the identitarian and preventive functions of memorial and commemorative initiatives such as the Sighet Memorial Museum:

'This museum is an obstacle against forgetfulness.'

'A remarkable and necessary accomplishment. The horrors of the Communist regime should never be forgotten!'

'Each Romanian should visit this place. Never forget!'

'Ravishing and overwhelming. A lesson in history. It is necessary to know the truth about what happened in order to stop such things from happening again.'

'I am deeply impressed by what I saw in this holy place. We must never forget history in all its aspect. We must not forget the past and our nation's heroes. Otherwise, we will lose our identity.'

'Never forget!'

The preventive role of the Sighet Memorial against the revival of the Communist totalitarianism becomes a major narrative theme in itself. This theme is attributed meaning through the adjoining of features which describe the perceived nature of the Communist regime – such as 'suffering', 'perverted', 'horrors', and 'terror' – to remarks focused on the hope that such events will 'never' happen 'again'. Such hope is usually expressed through invocations of God's protection, which reconfirms the strong Christian core of The Visitor's meaning-making process:

'May God rest the souls of the victims and never allow the revival of Communism which inflicted such suffering and perverted minds.'

‘Visiting this space of suffering we must strengthen our souls so that never and nowhere such horrors caused by our fellow beings can happen again.’

‘This museum should remain a permanent shield against Communist terror.’

‘May God help us never be in the situations described in this museum. May God protect us!’

‘May God protect us so that we never experience this again.’

‘We must tell our heirs what happened here so that something like this will never happen again!’

‘We hope such times will NEVER happen again!’

‘Impressive and painful. We hope the Romanians will never again go through such things.’

‘I shed bitter tears in this place! May God keep us safe from TOTALITARIANISM from now on!!’

The identitarian transformational role of the Sighet Memorial Museum also reveals itself as a significant narrative theme. From a societal symbolical perspective, this is expressed through remarks such as ‘we will find ourselves again as a people’, ‘rediscover [...] our Romanian soul’, ‘our people find their real and natural destiny again’, and ‘our rebirth’. The choice of phrasing focused on ‘our’ and ‘people’ exposes a strong identitarian bond between The Visitor and the interpretation displayed at the Sighet Memorial Museum. This type of meaning-making critically reveals the ontological nature of the perceived transformation:

'Eternal gratitude to the martyrs of our nation. Through their sacrifice, we will find ourselves again as a people.'

'Sighet will help Romanians rediscover our history and our Romanian soul.'

'Too many broken destinies. With them, the natural destiny of our nation was also broken. May our people find their real and natural destiny again.'

'Honor to those who thought about the suffering of our nation's greatest people. Their suffering should lead to our rebirth.'

In some situations, this societal identitarian transformation is attributed meaning through a narrative connection between the history of Communist repression and The Visitor's declared hopes for the future:

'I refuse to believe their sacrifice was in vain. Their blood will become the foundation of our future. So help us God!'

'We hope to learn from the mistakes of the past! Through this, we hope to find the way to a better future: for this country, for our children and us!'

In other situations, The Visitor associates meaning to the theme of societal identitarian transformation by focusing on the moral aspect of this change. This is expressed through the association of the Sighet Memorial Museum to statements such as 'the reactivation of the Romanian moral consciousness', 'the real salvation of our people', 'our moral regeneration', 'spiritual regeneration for the Romanian nation', and 'the regeneration of the collective memory':

'Ravishing space of memory for the reactivation of the Romanian moral consciousness.'

'Only after the whole Romanian nation will have visited this place the real salvation of our people will be achieved. It is hard to leave comments among tears.'

'My deepest gratitude for their suffering. Our moral regeneration begins with their commemoration.'

'We thank you for the transformation of this hideous place of death and suffering in a spring of spiritual regeneration for the Romanian nation!'

'A touching depiction of the suffering of the nation. Glory to our peoples' martyrs. Honor to those who invest in the regeneration of the collective memory.'

Frequently, the theme of identitarian transformation gains meaning through a perceived feeling of sacrifice. In fact, the idea of the sacrifice assumed by the political prisoners for the benefit of present generations becomes an essential theme of The Visitor's meaning-making process. The narrative link between the political prisoners and The Visitor reveals a strong identitarian bond with the interpretation displayed at the Sighet Memorial Museum rooted in a perceived feeling of sacrifice:

'May God rest the souls of those who sacrificed here decades ago so we can have a better life today.'

'Emotion and respect for those who sacrificed themselves for the rest of us. May God be with them, and may He protect us from living through this again.'

'The soul is too small for all the emotion I have for those who suffered for us. May God rest their souls!'

'Thanks to you we can be here today!'

'Eternal peace to the heroes who sacrificed themselves for future generations.'

One aspect brought in the discussion for attributing meaning to this theme of sacrifice is that of the contemporary societal freedom. The Visitor makes sense of this aspect through frequent narrative connections between 'free(dom)' and words such as 'fought', 'suffered', 'sacrificed', and 'died'. Further meaning is attributed to this narrative link between sacrifice and freedom through remarks disclosing emotional reactions triggered by the interaction with the narrative on display, such as 'thank you', 'thanks', 'extraordinary', 'painful', 'impressive', 'respect', 'honor, and 'let's never forget'. The strong emotional involvement in this aspect is assumed from the generally imperative tone. The fact that statements about 'freedom' are one of the most frequently used means for making sense of the Sighet Memorial Museum critically exposes this value as fundamental in The Visitor's meaning-making process. Through the previously discussed filter of Christianity, this recurrent connection between the perceived sacrifice of the political prisoners for the freedom of present generations symbolically mirrors the biblical episode of the sacrificial crucifixion of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity. Under the same umbrella of Christianity, the frequent references to 'freedom' are presumed to hold deep meanings for The Visitor as Freedom is perceived as both the strongest driving force and ultimate life goal for Christian believers:

'Thank you for fighting so we can be free today!'

'The Sighet Memorial is a masterpiece of historical art which shows the suffering of those who suffered and died so we can be free today.'

'I thank those who fought for this country to be free!'

'Thank you for making us realize how free we are and thanks to whom!'

'Thousands of thanks to those who suffered for our freedom!!!'

'Your suffering enabled the whole nation to live in freedom and peace. Thank you!'

'I came to pay my respects to our martyrs. Thanks to them we have our freedom and belief in God.'

'This memorial made me realize others suffered so that we can enjoy the freedom of thinking nowadays. The museum is well-kept. Congratulations!'

'There is nothing more important than FREEDOM!'

'It is extraordinary that we can visit a place where people suffered for one word: FREEDOM.'

'Impressive and painful to see so many people suffer for freedom.'

'We thank those who sacrificed for our freedom.'

'Impressive. Let's never forget the sacrifices made by our predecessors. Freedom is a universal right hard to obtain.'

'Although painful, this is a part of the history and past of our people. Let's never forget and let's honor our predecessors who died for freedom!!!'

'A prayer for the souls of those who suffered long years in prison for the religious and political freedom of the Romanian nation.'

'There is no greater punishment than being deprived of freedom.'

'Respect to those who suffered here. I am pregnant, and I am happy to be able to raise my child in a free country. Human rights should not be trampled under any circumstance.'

Alongside freedom, other values – truth, righteousness, democracy, dignity, humanity - are also connected to the theme of sacrifice in the process of attributing meaning to the Sighet Memorial Museum. Meaning and dramatism are achieved through the narrative connection of these values to words describing the nature of political imprisonment, such as 'torturing', 'criminality', 'suffering', 'cold', 'misery', 'pain', and 'death'. The Visitor adds further meaning to the narrative by mentioning emotional reactions generated by the interaction with the museal interpretation, such as 'nothing sadder and more terrible', 'praised be the names', 'eternal regrets', 'respect', 'deeply impressed', '(deep) respect', 'warm thought and pious homage', 'gratitude', and 'honor'. The frequent mentioning of 'democracy' exposes the ontological transformation brought by the 1989 Revolution and change of political regime on the Romanian society:

'There is nothing sadder and more terrible in this world that torturing innocent people who fought for righteousness and freedom. The prison will forever keep the memory of their sacrifice.'

'A museum of darkness, of criminality. Praised by the names of the martyrs who gave their lives for righteousness, democracy, and freedom.'

'Eternal regrets for those who sacrificed themselves in the name of freedom and democracy.'

'In the Sighet Memorial, we discovered both the Hell of suffering and the altar from which the souls of our brothers – confessors and martyrs – rose to the Heavens in holy light.'

Only respect for their sacrifice! May God offer eternal rest to these fighters for light and freedom of the soul without which a real democratic life can never be achieved.'

'The cold, misery, and pain in this place make me appreciate our democracy.'

'We thank our predecessors for leaving us the most precious legacy: democracy and freedom of expression.'

'The Memorial – an impressive universe dedicated to the suffering and sacrifice of those who believed in truth, freedom, and dignity until their last breath.'

'Truth will set you free.'

'I was deeply impressed by everything I saw here, especially by the suffering endured by those who believed in righteousness and truth until death.'

'Deep respect for those who sacrificed for faith, freedom, and for the real values of humanity.'

'A warm thought and pious homage to those who had the courage to fight for freedom and democracy.'

'A lot of pain and suffering for freedom and truth. Gratitude, respect and honor for these heroes!'

In the spirit of these values, The Visitor introduces another important theme of the meaning-making process: the importance of young and future generations of Romanians to be educated about the history of the Communist repression through initiatives such as the Sighet Memorial Museum. The focus is on the moral and identitarian importance of

such historical education, as suggested by statements such as ‘light guiding [...] towards what is good, noble and beautiful’, ‘enlighten the hearts and souls [...] towards wisdom and understanding for the common good’, ‘patriotism, dignity, and values’, ‘not the material poverty but the poverty of the soul and mind’, ‘keep awake the conscience of freedom’, and ‘example of being a Romanian’:

‘May memory remain the light guiding young and future generations towards what is good, noble and beautiful on our Romanian land.’

‘Extremely impressive! Young people should know this real history!’

‘The name of Sighet will be associated in the future with the past. This past should never be forgotten, and it should especially be known by young generations.’

‘May the emotions triggered by this prison enlighten the hearts and souls of the young generations towards wisdom and understanding for the common good and prosperity of the Romanian nation.’

‘A lesson of history which should be known by each teenager and young person. Many of us learned here what real patriotism, dignity, and values are.’

‘Terrifying and full of history. Painful, but useful to future generations.’

‘I congratulate those who initiated this project for showing future generations this genocide of the Romanian intellectuals.’

‘I hope future generations will learn from it and understand that it is not the material poverty but the poverty of the soul and mind which are the worst tragedy.’

'May their suffering keep awake the conscience of freedom for future generations.'

'For our children, it is a lesson of authentic history and an example of being a Romanian which we can no longer find in today's society.'

In the same metaphysical line focused on identitarian and moral education, The Visitor repeatedly promotes the former political prisoners as role models for present-day generations of Romanians. This is expressed through remarks such as 'example for us to follow', 'we [...] follow the path', 'we continue fighting', 'we follow their examples', '[l]et us follow their example', '[y]our example gives our lives the push to fight', 'follow their path', and '[i]t gave me strong motivation'. The identitarian focus is suggested by references to '[Romanian] nation', 'our nation', 'our history', 'our motherland', and '[w]e should be Romanians'. The moral emphasis is expressed through the mentioning of 'respectable', 'faith', 'truth', 'dignity', 'free', 'righteousness', and 'humility, fear of God, love for one another, honesty. The Christian core of The Visitor's meaning-making process is reconfirmed by the frequent references to God, souls, Jesus Christ, and martyrs:

'These prisoners set a wonderful example for us to follow!'

'With pain and pride, we thank God for the light this establishment brings in our lives by acknowledging this past for the future of a respectable nation. We will try to follow the path you have shown us here.'

'May God rest these souls who fought for the Romanian nation. And may we continue fighting for faith and truth.'

'May God rest their souls, and may we follow their examples of dignity. Eternal honor and gratitude!'

'The Sighet prison makes us happy because we realize our nation had people who marked our history for eternity! Let us follow their example!'

'We are proud of you. Your example gives our lives the push to fight until the ultimate sacrifice so that TRUTH will enlighten the existence of our MOTHERLAND. >>TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE<< (JESUS CHRIST).'

'May God offer peace to our martyrs! Our generations must follow their path of humility, fear of God, love for one another, honesty. We should be Romanians, we should be humans, and we should never forget them.'

'Impressive, terrifying. It gave me strong motivation to fight for righteousness and dignity.'

Another way The Visitor attributes meaning to this perception of the former political prisoners as examples to follow is by bringing back the theme of identitarian transformation on both individual and collective levels. The acknowledged personal transformation is suggested by the choice of words such as 'made me think', 'influenced my vision', 'I realize', 'makes us reconsider', 'changed my way of thinking', 'source of meditation', 'discover themselves', 'lesson [...] and teaching'. This is further reinforced by the labeling of the visiting experience at the Sighet Memorial Museum as a 'reform of the spirit' and 'purifying act of memory':

'This history and these moments of re-education make me think we are too superficial, dissatisfied and indifferent. We have everything, and we are ever-so-dissatisfied without realizing the real happiness lies in the freedom that these prisoners did not have.'

'Visiting this museum influenced my vision about today's life. I cannot believe people were tortured, beaten and starved like this. I hope that never will our or any other nation live through such horror.'

'Terrible! When I think about everything I have, and I remember my dissatisfactions, I realize how selfish I am.'

'The emotion of the freedom gained by accessing our collective memory makes us reconsider our attitudes about ideas, life, people.'

'Visiting the entire Memorial and seeing all the items which belonged to the prisoners I became extremely sad realizing how much we have nowadays and how little we appreciate what we have. This visit changed my way of thinking.'

'Heroes endured suffering no matter of their nationality. May their fate become a source of meditation on present-day issues which divide people.'

'All Romanians should come and visit. Once inside, they can discover themselves!'

'A real lesson of history, morality, and civilization. A lesson for the mind and teaching for the soul.'

'This museum is an argument for a >>reform of the spirit<<.'

'When visiting this terrifying concentration camp each of us relives history as a purifying act of memory!'

Yet another means of attributing meaning to the perceived transformational role of coming in contact with the history and values of the victims of Communist repression is by reflecting on the societal conditions which allowed for such acts to happen. These reflective thoughts are usually expressed through a mixture of rhetorical questions and accusatory statements. The fact that The Visitor sutures personal reflective thoughts to the narrative of repression displayed at the Sighet Memorial Museum reconfirms the aforementioned identitarian connection with the site and its history:

'Full of emotion at the thought of these martyrs' suffering we ask ourselves: where have we been and what have we done in this time?'

'A temple dedicated to the negative aspects of Communism. Three quarters of our parents are guilty of these aspects. Or maybe we are all guilty.'

'Do we, the people surprised by what we see here, have no fault for what happened? The members of parliament have secured special pensions. What have the heirs of the former political prisoners received?'

'Why did these people have to die? Why did no one do anything to stop this? How was this possible? Would I have resisted this treatment?'

One of the most important themes of The Visitor's sense-making process is that of negative emotions towards Communism and its supporters. A way of attributing meaning to this theme is through repeated and imperative calls for judicial acts against

the Communist ideology and the perpetrators of repressive actions. In some cases, such calls are linked to a sub-theme of international betrayal, while in others they are placed in the context of the recent sentencing of former Communist prison commanders for crimes against humanity:

‘When will we have a trial of Communism? After all the witnesses will have already perished?’

‘In the memory of the patriotic heroes who fought against the Communist criminals, we ask for the trial of Communism and Communists to start!’

‘This memorial should become a place of pilgrimage for all Romanians. I have the deepest respect for its developers and I am waiting for the TRIAL OF COMMUNISM!’

‘This tragedy deserves a trial of Communism. But also, this tragedy would not have been possible without the betrayal of the UK and US. The Treaty of Yalta placed us in the hands of the Communists.’

‘Today, 24 July 2015, Ion Ficior will be sentenced to prison 25 years later than all of them should have been trialed for what they did.’

In other cases, The Visitor shifts from calls for worldly justice to imperative invocations of divine righteousness. This entire theme of justice is assumed to hold deep meanings considering Justice is a fundamental pillar of Christianity according to which the souls of the deceased may be allowed passage into the Heavens on the day of Final Judgement based on their earthly deeds:

‘Something like this was never meant to happen!!! God will judge everyone based on their deeds.’

‘God will make justice!’

Sometimes, The Visitor’s calls for justice take a vindictive turn which is expressed through repeated references to ‘punish(ed)’ and hopeful remarks for the perpetrators to ‘pay for’ their actions:

‘The perpetrators who committed these atrocities and are still alive should be punished.’

‘May God punish those who committed these unimaginable actions, and may He rest the souls of those who sacrificed themselves for this nation.’

‘The perpetrators must pay for what they did!’

‘I wonder if someone will ever pay for these horrors. We must never forget those responsible for these broken destinies.’

In other moments, such vengeful remarks become morbid. This is expressed through repeated blunt and imperative calls for the ‘death’ of Communists supporters still alive. Thus, one way of attributing meaning to this aspect is by bringing back in the discussion the theme of the persistence of individuals from the former Communist apparatus in the post-1989 societal mechanism of Romania:

‘Death to the secret police and Communists. Down with Communism!’

‘Death to those Communists who are still alive!’

'I hope I will see the day when at least one of those who tortured these people will be shot in the head! No more confessions, books, and weeps. All those who are guilty must pay! Death to all Communists, now!'

Occasionally, these themes of negative emotions and persistence of Communist elements in the contemporaneous society are attributed the palpable figure of the former president Ion Iliescu and the Social Democrat Party. This gains further meaning considering this political party is governing Romania at the time of the current research:

'Ion Iliescu and many others deserve to be locked up in such a place.'

'All I want is to see comrade Ion Iliescu and his gang in the Social Democrat Party wearing stripes and locked up in the black cell. So help us God!'

A perceived feeling frequently mentioned by The Visitor regarding the Communist ideology and its supporters is hatred. This feeling is usually combined with imperative statements against forgiving or forgetting the crimes of the Communist regime. The emotional involvement in this theme is exposed by the sustained exclamatory tone throughout the meaning-making process:

'After visiting the Memorial, I hate the Communists even more!'

'I have a feeling of nervousness and hatred for those who beat, killed and destroyed all that was beautiful.'

'After visiting this museum, one cannot stop feeling revolt and eternal hatred of Communism. Never forget and never forgive!'

'Never forgive the Communists. They should be shown the evil they brought upon this country.'

'I WILL NOT FORGIVE UNTIL I DIE those who committed these unimaginable crimes.'

The negative emotions are not aimed solely at the individuals who were involved in repressive acts, but also to the Communist ideology. The perceived nature of this ideology is expressed through labels such as '(dirty) stain on the history' and 'one of the darkest pages in the history of humanity', and through the comparison to another repressive ideology – fascism:

'May this be a lesson about one of the darkest pages in the history of humanity: Communism!'

'Communism was more criminal than fascism.'

'Communism is a dirty stain on the history of Europe.'

'Communism is a stain on the history of the world.'

4.2.2 A Cross-case Identitarian Synthesis

Having developed 24 phenomenological portraits and exposed different narrative themes and ways of attributing meaning to the investigated topic, the current section takes the interpretative process further to provide a synthesis of different components of the identity *with* the Sighet Memorial Museum.

First and foremost, the Sighet Memorial Museum is a *place of political imprisonment and repression*. This is acknowledged by all participants at different levels and from different perspectives. Some perceive it as a *place of personal imprisonment and repression*, as Mr. Ilban, Mr. Bjoza, and The Visitor narrate their own experiences of incarceration in the Sighet Penitentiary or other Communist prisons. Many others see it as a *place of familial imprisonment and repression*, with most participants – for example, Mr. Constantinescu, Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Rusan, Mr. Pop, Mr. Iusco, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe, Mr. Puric, Mrs. Hașu, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, or The Visitor - referring to family members and close acquaintances having lived through different forms of political persecution under the Communist regime. Yet others perceive it as a *place of national imprisonment and repression* closely connected to the image of a *place of imprisonment and repression of the Romanian political, intellectual, and spiritual elites*. This is linked to another essential identitarian construction for the Sighet Memorial Museum, that of *place of suffering*. If the ones mentioned above speak of the personal, familial, or societal suffering under the Communist regime, others – such as Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Rusan, Mr. Fürtös, Mr. Preda, Mr. Mureșan, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, Mrs. Hașu, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, Ms. Stănciulescu, Mr. Puric, and The Visitor - detail their perceived suffering with realizing the magnitude and diversity of repression during their visiting experience or historical research. The participants' narrative connection between their own suffering and the suffering on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum turns this institution into a *place of compassion*. Linked to this, the fact that most participants emphasize the political prisoners' choice of suffering and repression over giving up their values and faith, and connect this choice with the modern-day freedom of expression exposes the Sighet

Memorial Museum as a *place of sacrifice of the political prisoners for the benefit of present generations*. Also, the frequent repetition across portraits of remarks such as ‘never forget’ or ‘never again’ transforms the Sighet Memorial Museum in a *place against forgetfulness* and a *place for preventing the revival of totalitarianism*. In this line of political repression and suffering, narrative parallels between the Communist and Nazi / Fascist regimes by participants such as Mr Constantinescu, Mr Preda, Mr Mureșan, Mrs. Hașu, Mr Tudor-Popescu, Mr Puric, Ms Stănciulescu, and The Visitor turns the Sighet Memorial Museum into a *place which calls for equal commemorative, investigative, and judicial interest for the victims of Communist and Nazi / Fascist regimes*.

Of equal importance is the image of the Sighet Memorial Museum as a *place of memories from the young formative years*. All participants begin their sense-making process with such memories. In most cases, these are memories of growing up in hardship under the Communist regime, but some – such as Mr. Iliescu, Mr. Ciolpan, and Mrs. Trifoi – they are memories of hardship before the Communist regime and an improvement of life once the Communists came to power. Some participants – such as Mr. Pop, Mr. Iusco, Mr. Voinaghi, Mr. Bârlea, Mr. Ilban, and Mr. Kondrat – narrate memories of being born and/or educated in or in the proximity of Sighetu Marmăției. Other participants – such as Mr. Fürtös, Mr. Mureșan, Mr. Nistor, Mrs. Hașu, and Mr. Puric – provide memories of getting in contact with the history of Communist repression during their formative years. In any case, the fact that participants begin their meaning-making process by connecting memories of their formative years to the theme of Communist repression transforms the Sighet Memorial Museum in a *place of identitarian connection*. This is reinforced by the fact that all participants suture their personal experiences to the museal interpretation.

Also, the way most participants choose to attribute meaning to the investigated topic turns the Sighet Memorial Museum in a *place of identitarian merging between personal, familial, and national destinies*.

Another crucial identitarian construction of the Sighet Memorial Museum is that of a *place of ontological transformation*. Most participants speak of a *place of personal ontological transformation* when narrating their perceived inner change(s) triggered by the encounters with the history of the Communist repression, the values promoted by the former political prisoners, and anti-Communist resistance. Contrastingly, participants such as Mr. Iliescu, Mr. Ciolpan, and Mrs. Trifoi link this personal ontological transformation to the assumption of power by the Communists. Almost all participants connect this identitarian construct to that of a *place of societal ontological transformation* usually attributed to the changes brought about by the 1989 anti-Communist Revolution.

In strong connection to this transformational aspect, most participants associate the Sighet Memorial Museum with a *place for the assumption of responsibility*. Some participants such as Mr. Iusco, Mr. Puric, Ms. Stănciulescu, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, Mr. Voinaghi, Mr. Bârlea, Mr. Preda, Mr. Ilban, Mr. Constantinescu, and The Visitor speak about a *place for the perpetrators' personal assumption of responsibility for repressive actions*. Most participants attribute meaning to the investigated topic by portraying institutions such as the Sighet Memorial Museum as *places for the personal assumption of responsibility for initiating or getting involved in projects for societal change*. Apart from Mr Iliescu, all those who speak about personal assumption of responsibility for societal change under the umbrella of the investigated topic connect this identitarian

construct with that of a *place of personal assumption of responsibility for initiating or getting involved in projects for the commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime and the popularization of the history of Communist repression*. Out of the latter group of participants, Mr. Iusco, Mr. Pop, and The Visitor perceive the Sighet Memorial Museum as a ***place of pilgrimage*** where visitors come purposefully to commemorate and pay their respects to the victims of the Communist repression. Continuing the line of assumption of responsibility, participants such as Mrs. Hașu, Mr. Bârlea, Mr. Mureșan, Mr. Preda, and Mr. Constantinescu make sense of the Sighet Memorial Museum by referring to a *place for the societal assumption of responsibility for sensitive and painful aspects of the national history*. The fact that such a perception is usually linked to a potential for personal, familial, and societal healing transforms the Sighet Memorial Museum in a ***place of atonement***. Lastly, the attribution of meaning by Mr. Iliescu, Mr. Ciolpan, and Mrs. Trifoi turns the Sighet Memorial Museum into a *place of no personal assumption of responsibility for repressive actions among active supporters of the Communist regime*.

The identitarian construct of *place of personal assumption of responsibility* is intimately connected to that of ***place for educating the young and future generations of Romanians***. Almost all the participants – Mr. Iusco, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe, Mr. Puric, Mr. Voinaghi, Mr. Constantinescu, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, Mrs. Hașu, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, Mr. Nistor, Mr. Bârlea, Mr. Mureșan, Mr. Bjoza, Mr. Kondrat, Mr. Rusan, Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Fürtös, The Visitor - make sense of the Sighet Memorial Museum by attributing the meaning of *place for educating the young and future generations of Romanians about the history of Communist repression and the values promoted by the former political*

prisoners. Under this identitarian umbrella, one participant – Mr. Iliescu – refers to a *place for educating young and future generations of Romanians about modern history*. When referring precisely to the values promoted by former political prisoners, the attribution of meaning by most participants turns the Sighet Memorial Museum into a ***place of existential values***, such as freedom, truth, righteousness, democracy, independence, dignity, and humanity. In close connection, most participants promote the Sighet Memorial Museum as a ***place which provides role models and examples to follow for present-day generations***. Among the mentioned values, the narrative emphasis, frequency of mention and amount of detail transform the Sighet Museum into a ***place of justice***. Most participants link the image of a *place of earthly legislative justice* focused on sentencing the initiators and perpetrators of repressive actions to that of *place of symbolical and metaphysical Christian justice*. Among them, some participants such as Mr. Constantinescu, Mr. Preda, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, Mr. Pop, and The Visitor perceive it as a *place for condemning the Communist ideology*. Almost all those speaking about the need to educate young generations of Romanians about the history of totalitarian repression, about the existential values promoted by the former political prisoners, and about judicial acts focused on the Communist ideology and its supporters connect these identitarian constructs to a perception of the Sighet Memorial Museum as a ***place for the moral and identitarian regeneration of the Romanian nation***. More precisely, most participants emphasize the moral and identitarian regenerative functions of coming in contact with the history of the former political prisoners and the values promoted by them. Linked to this identitarian construction, the fact that most participants speak about aspects such as land, family, faith and prayers, birth and baptism,

or death and funeral which are fundamental existential aspects of the archaic Romanian lifestyle with strong symbolical and ritualistic meanings and functions transforms the Sighet Memorial Museum in a *place for the safekeeping and transgenerational transmission of culture and heritage*. In the same line, all participants choose to include examples of national history (such as the 1918 national reunification, the territorial losses after the World War II, the 1989 Revolution, and the violent repression of the student protesters in June 1990), names of political figures (such as Iuliu Maniu, Corneliu Coposu, and members of the Brătianu Family), or references to the Romanian language, culture, and faith which hold fundamental existential meanings for millions of Romanians. This transforms the Sighet Memorial Museum in a *place of national solidarity*. Also, most participants directly or indirectly refer to values and rites of the Christian belief throughout their meaning-making process. This turns the Sighet Memorial Museum into a *place for the physical and metaphysical manifestation of the Christian belief*.

Closely linked to the educational and regenerative functions presented above, participants such as Mr. Constantinescu, Mr. Preda, Mr. Voinaghi, Mrs. Hașu, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, and The Visitor perceive the Sighet Memorial Museum as a *place of in situ importance* associated to the development of the museal institution inside the former penitentiary. In other instances, participants such as Mr. Constantinescu, Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Kondrat, Mr. Bjoza, Mr. Preda, Mr. Mureșan, Mr. Bârlea, Ms. Stănciulescu, Mrs. Hașu, Mr. Puric, and The Visitor emphasize its function as a *place of pioneering importance* explained by the fact that it was the first and remains the only museal institution in Romania dedicated to the history of Communist repression.

Participants such as Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Rusan, Mr. Fürtös, Mr. Kondrat, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, and The Visitor perceive the Sighet Memorial Museum as a *place of touristic interest and activity*. In the same line, certain participants see the site as a *place of work and subsistence*. For example, Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Rusan, Mr. Fürtös, Mr. Kondrat, and Mr. Bârlea speak of working or having worked for the Sighet Memorial Museum, while Mr. Ciolpan and Mrs. Trifoi place this identitarian construct in the context of the former Sighet Penitentiary.

The fact that most participants make sense of the investigated topic by critically linking it to modern-day Romania transforms the Sighet Memorial Museum in a *place for reflecting upon and understanding the contemporary Romanian society*. Almost all participants notice the democratization of the nation and emphasize freedom of expression as the major positive post-1989 societal change. This increase in freedom of expression is usually counterbalanced by a perceived moral decay and identitarian diffusion closely linked to a corrupt and interest-driven political class. This aspect is mentioned by all participants except for Mr. Iliescu, Mr. Ciolpan, Mrs. Trifoi, and Mr. Ilban. Most of those speaking about the moral decay, identitarian diffusion, and corrupt political class tend to go further in their interpretation and connect these societal features with a perception of the Sighet Memorial Museum as a *place for acknowledging the persistence of individuals, values, and practices from the Communist regime in the contemporary Romanian society*. In the same vein, participants such as Mr. Constantinescu, Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Rusan, Mr. Fürtös, Mr. Kondrat, Mr. Bjoza, Mr. Preda, Mr. Mureşan, Mr. Bârlea, Mr. Voinaghi, Mr. Nistor, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, Mrs. Haşu, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, Ms. Stănciulescu, Mr. Puric, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe, and The Visitor perceive the Sighet

Memorial Museum as a *place for accessing the real national history and countering purposeful attempts at historical censorship and distortion by the continuators of the Communist regime*. Most of these participants promote the Sighet Memorial Museum as a *place of courage and defiance* when they narrate issues they have experienced for their involvement in projects focused on the history of Communist repression, such as limited access to resources, censoring pressures, loss of jobs, and death threats. Moreover, the Sighet Memorial Museum is revealed as a *place of open criticism and expression of political disagreements*. For example: Mr. Constantinescu, Mr. Fürtös, Mr. Kondrat, Mr. Voinaghi, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, Ms. Stănciulescu, Mr. Iusco, and The Visitor accuse Mr. Iliescu; Mr. Iliescu and Mr. Constantinescu accuse former Romanian president Traian Băsescu; Mr. Voinaghi expresses disappointment with Mr. Constantinescu; Mr. Iusco criticizes the institution represented by Mr. Pop; and Mr. Preda accuses his predecessor as the executive president of the IICCMER, Mr. Andrei Muraru.

Looking over the individual portraits, one can propose the Sighet Memorial Museum as a *place of dissonant perceptions* which is attributed meaning from different perspectives. From one perspective, the Sighet Memorial Museum appears as a *place of dissonant memories about the nature of the Communist regime*. While most participants portray the Communist regime in solely negative shades of repression, suffering, and decay, some participants such as Mr. Iliescu, Mr. Ciolpan, and Mrs. Trifoi speak about the improved quality of life under the Communist administration. From another perspective, the Sighet Memorial Museum becomes a *place of dissonant interpretation*. Although some participants such as Mr. Pop, Mr. Tudor Gheorghe, Mrs. Hașu, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, Mr. Bjoza, and Mr. Voinaghi perceive the displayed interpretation in a

favorable light, others such as Mr Constantinescu, Mr Preda, Mr Mureșan, Mr Tudor-Popescu, and Mr Puric are critical of the recent renovation works which allegedly diminish its *in situ* importance. Depending on the moment, The Visitor holds an ambivalent position either enthusiastic or critical about the displayed interpretation. A clear example of dissonant interpretation appears in the discussions about the interpretation of religious repression. Mr Pop – the Archpriest of the Orthodox Church in Sighetu Marmăției – praises the museal interpretation, Mr Iusco – the Archpriest of the Greek-Catholic Church in Sighetu Marmăției – is very critical at the Greek-Catholic Church being placed alongside other cults, while Mrs. Blandiana – the developer of the Sighet Memorial Museum – speaks about the intense pressures and lack of support from both the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches. Another example of dissonant interpretation revolves around perceptions of international involvement. Participants such as Mrs. Blandiana, Mr. Constantinescu, Mr. Rusan, and Mrs. Hossu-Longin emphasize the protective importance of international support for countering censoring factors and developing memorial projects. Other participants focus on the negative impacts of foreign interests which they make sense of in different contexts. For example, Mr. Constantinescu, Mr. Rusan, Mr. Preda, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, Mr. Puric, Mr. Iusco, and The Visitor link the political repression in Romania to the interests of Russia. Participants such as Mr. Iusco, Mr. Puric, Mrs. Hossu-Longin, and The Visitor connect the entrance of Romania under the Russian sphere of influence to the perceived international betrayal of other nations. In other cases, participants such as Mr. Iliescu, Mr. Puric, Mr. Iusco, and Mr. Tudor Gheorghe focus on the negative influence of international interest-driven powers in the internal matters of the post-1989 Romanian society. One

other example of dissonant interpretation stems from the discussions about the development of a new museal institution focused on the history of Communist repression in the capital city of Romania. Most of the participants express their strong support for such an initiative. Out of them, those directly involved in the development and management of the Sighet Memorial Museum – Mr. Fürtös, Mr. Bârlea, Mr. Kondrat, Mrs. Blandiana – mix their support for new projects with a perceived feeling of disappointment and unfairness with being ignored and excluded from such discussions about memorial initiatives.

Fundamentally, a cross-portrait interpretative analysis reveals the Sighet Memorial Museum as a *place of strong emotional involvement*. Instances of subjectivity and emotional immersion frequently appear within and across portraits. They are usually expressed through different means, such as: imperative / exclamatory remarks, (self)reflective statements, accusatory remarks and labels, rhetorical questions, portrayals of emotional inner experiences and intimate life episodes, open or subtle criticism, foul / vivid language, popular sayings, vivid depictions of repression, sarcasm, irony, (dark) humor, grotesque, absolutist remarks and concepts, anecdotic episodes, and biblical and historical analogies. A large variety of emotional reactions are openly acknowledged by the 24 participants. Some of them are about the former political prisoners, such as: compassion, honor, love, homage, thankfulness, respect, glory, praise, hope, gratitude, pride, peace, admiration, remembrance, commemoration, atonement, forgiveness, prayers, awakening, transformation, regeneration, longing, and role models. Additional emotion stems from the diversity of concepts used by the participants to express their perceived nature of the Communist regime, such as: fear, suffering, destruction,

repression, beatings, starvation, imprisonment, calamities, torments, arrests, horrors, criminality, cold, misery, atrocities, death, perversion, ordeals, slaughter, mass graves, extermination, decay, corruption, torture, killings, censorship, manipulation, indoctrination, terror, desperation, hopelessness, chains, punishment, and genocide. Other emotional reactions are linked to the visiting experience and the interaction with the interpretation on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum: shock, stupefaction, amazement, rebirth, bitterness, sadness, pain, suffering, absurdity, silence, shame, regret, unfairness, restlessness, tears, sighs, goosebumps, shivers, screams, soul tremble. The existence of the Sighet Memorial Museum is portrayed through emotional reactions such as tragic, shocking, sinister, grim, touching, terrifying, spectacular, impressive, useful, remarkable, necessary, special, beautiful, interesting, numbing, (dis)satisfying, disappointing, boring, confusing, and disgusting. Typical emotional reactions when talking about the perpetrators of repressive actions during the Communist regime are vengeance, punishment, hatred, nervousness, revolt, accusatory tone, imperative calls for justice, and warnings against forgetfulness and the revival of Communist totalitarianism. Yet others are connected to practices of (self)reflection on the phenomenon of political repression, on the factors which allowed such actions to happen, on how the interaction with the history of political repression transforms personalities, and on the effects of the Communist totalitarian regime on the contemporary Romanian society. The strong emotional involvement of participants is visible through the diverse labels attached to the Sighet Memorial Museum, such as: 'Sighet is only a page of a history with deeper roots', 'place of ordeal', 'place of torment', 'place of terror', 'memorial of suffering', 'space of Romanian suffering', 'hideous place of death and suffering', 'museum of darkness, of

criminality', 'human abattoir', 'mass grave of the Romanian intellectuals', 'cathedral of death which is shameful for the Romanian nation', 'a place for the decaying, torturing, and killing of everything Romania held valuable', 'an impressive universe dedicated to the suffering and sacrifice of those who believed in truth, freedom and dignity until their last breath', 'place of suffering and martyrdom of fellow humans', 'memorial of pain, of trauma, of the history of my people', 'home of our nation's martyrs', '*topos* of national memory', 'a Capital of Memory [...] representative of the geography of detention in Romania', 'an initiative of conscience', 'sacred place for remembrance', 'a sacred temple, [...] a sanctuary', 'a temple', 'place of pilgrimage', 'holy place', 'fantastic lesson of contemporary history', 'lesson for future generations', 'real lesson of history', 'obstacle against forgetfulness', 'bastion of the fight against totalitarianism and political barbarism', 'permanent shield against Communist terror', 'ravishing space of memory for the reactivation of the Romanian moral consciousness', 'spring of spiritual regeneration for the Romanian nation', 'moral point of reference' which can facilitate the 'judgement of history', 'terrifying concentration camp' where each visitor 'relives history as a purifying act of memory', 'a real lesson of history, morality, and civilization. A lesson for the mind and teaching for the soul', 'a lesson of authentic history and an example of being a Romanian which we can no longer find in today's society', 'the Romanian nation is incomplete and infirm without the memory of the victims of the Communist regime. This infirmity can be fixed through constructions such as the Sighet Memorial Museum', 'an argument for a >>reform of the spirit<<', 'a masterpiece of historical art', and 'a wonderful work of art'.

One intimate narrative, in particular, reveals the developers' emotional connection with the site: *'I look at the Sighet Memorial with the feeling that Ana Blandiana and I raised a child who does not belong to us anymore. It is now on its own feet, it is visited by hundreds of thousands of people, it is appreciated and sometimes criticized, but we are still responsible for everything it does. In a way, we are tied, engaged, married for the second time through this child who reached adulthood. We think about it day after day, night after night, from a 650 kilometer-distance which amplifies our thoughts, worries, and plans for future. Physical distance dilates both the exaltations and the anguishes. [...]* We developed the Sighet Memorial as a sign of gratitude for the elderly who have had no youth, and as a sign of duty to the youth who run the risk of not knowing who they are anymore, where they come from and where they are heading to.'

5. DISCUSSION

This section brings together the two components of analysis – semiotic and phenomenological – and relevant literature to discuss the processes of identity construction at places associated with death and suffering. The links between identity *with* place and identity *of* place are investigated based on Brockmeier's (2002) three orders of narrative integration. This leads to the development of two experiential models – one theoretical and another empirical – for understanding the relationship between memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction at such sites. Based on all the findings and critical considerations, the study culminates with a rejection of Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* thesis and the conceptualization of *les milieux de mémoire sombre* translated as *places of somber memories*.

5.1 Identity Construction of 'Les (Mi)lieux de Mémoire Sombre':

Bridging between 'Identity with Place' and 'Identity of Place'

The study builds upon Dixon & Durrheim's (2000) proposal that studies on human experience in place can benefit from investigating the individualistic and collective nature of the relations between people, identities and their environments, as well as the dynamic processes of identitarian co-construction between people and the site materiality. As seen, Brockmeier (2002) perceives narrative as a strong integrating force within a symbolic space which overcomes the dichotomies between individual and collective memory, and between autobiographical memory and cultural materiality. Based

on this, the current analysis explores the connection between identity *with* place (the IPA analysis) and identity *of* place (the semiotic analysis) at the Sighet Memorial Museum based on Brockmeier's (2002) three orders of narrative integration previously discussed: linguistic, semiotic, and discursive. Before this, the study builds on the work of relevant scholars to propose a conceptual model for understanding the connection among place, memory, narrative, and identity in the context of (dark) tourism.

5.1.1 A Theoretical Model for Understanding the Place - Memory – Narrative – Identity Nexus in (Dark) Tourism

Marschall (2012, 2014) proposes that all the spaces, buildings, landscapes, objects or 'performances' researched or visited as 'heritage sites' are nothing but places of memory where personal and collective memories and narratives connect towards constructing self and national identities but also the identity of the place. Such places are developed to be seen and visited (Cubitt, 2007), and, increasingly, the audience that developers have in mind when displaying the past is tourists (Hewison, 1987; Goulding & Domic, 2009; Marschall, 2012). Ultimately, tourism provides complex emotions, memories, and experiences related to place (Noy, 2007), and Cutler & Carmichael (2010) argue that it is such place-based experiences individuals seek. Generally speaking, relationships with place involve a wide spectrum of emotions, from love and contentment to fear and hatred (Manzo, 2005). More precisely, emotional connection to tourism sites is the outcome of powerful individual and collective narratives and emplaced enactments, which, in turn, can make tourists' experience meaningful (Chronis, 2012b). By emplaced

enactments the author means the embodied presence within a narrative place providing opportunities for embodied practices. Similarly, Chronis (2006) suggests that the emotional response resulted from visitors' engagement with objects at heritage sites connects directly the transgenerational collective memories and narratives of the past with the human body in its present actuality, resulting in meaningful experiences. In this line, it has been argued that places of memory, and especially places of national heritage and fratricide death such as battlefields elicit strong and ambivalent emotions (Anderson, 1991; Smith, 1996b; Brockmeier, 2001; Chronis, 2005). This is reinforced by Lewicka (2011) who builds on the work of Casey (1997) to suggest that certain devastating and disruptive events of the century bring, in their aftershock, strong emotional reactions and a revitalized sensitivity and emotional bonds with place. The current study has proposed the totalitarian Communist regime in Romania to have been such an event.

The essential relationship between memory and the tourist industry is explicitly mentioned by Braun-LaTour, Grinley, & Loftus (2006, p. 360), who build upon the work of Kozak (2001), Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison (2004), and Woodside, Caldwell, & Albers-Miller (2004) to state that 'memory is important for the tourism industry because future decisions are based on it. For the tourist, that memory is perhaps the single most important source of information he or she will use in making a decision about whether or not to revisit. [...] For family, friends, coworkers, etc., assessments of that experience will be an important factor as they make their own travel arrangements'. The fact that memory influences the evaluation and perception of the tourist experiences in the short and long run and future decision-making processes is also noted by Fridgen (1984), Prentice (1998), Erll (2011) and Marschall (2012). In fact, the experience-focused tourism

literature confirms the fundamental connection between memory and leisure and tourism (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Larsen, 2007; Braun-LaTour, Grinley, & Loftus, 2006; Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Noy (2007) and Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung (2007) seem to agree on perceiving memories as filtering mechanisms linking the experience to the emotional and perceptual outcomes of the tourism practices. Cary (2004) and Selstad (2007) share a similar view on memory being not just an outcome of experience, but also an active force in the later representation and transformation of experience through narratives. Thus, Larsen (2007, p. 15) defines tourist experiences as ‘functions of memory processes’ and stresses the obligation of cognitive research approaches to tourist experience to consider the mental memory processes, as memory is all that remains once the experience has ended. Similarly, Cutler & Carmichael (2010, p. 19) see memory as ‘the most influential aspect of tourist experiences, as it can have a strong influence on other factors’ such as perception, meaning-making, and satisfaction. This comes to reinforce O’Sullivan & Spangler’s (1999) suggestion that individuals’ past experiences are infused and integrated into all aspects of their consumption and existence.

Highly relevant to the current study is Marschall’s (2012, 2014, 2015) conceptualization of ‘personal memory tourism’ as traveling to places linked to memorable periods and key moments in one’s life, sites which are important to one’s psyche or sense of self or with which one feels a deep emotional connection with, of happy, sad, or even traumatic nature (Marschall, 2012). Indeed, memory trips are not always aimed towards recapturing happy memories, but might equally revolve around negative and traumatic of tragedy, death, atrocity, and human disaster (Marschall, 2012). Thus, memory trips fundamentally, though not exclusively, intersect with the previously

discussed concept of dark tourism. May it be motivated by the rising opportunity of ‘underprivileged sectors of the population to showcase suppressed memories and neglected historical sites associated with under-represented narratives of oppression and resistance’ (Marschall, 2012, p. 326), or a quest in search of emotional healing, understanding, closure, atonement, breaking down of age-old silences, catharsis, identity, self-discovery, self-actualization, or the consolidation of the self, personal memory tourism is always strongly loaded with emotion and meaning, involves very deep psychological needs, and is inextricably intertwined with the construction of identity (Marschall, 2012, 2014). ‘Ultimately, personal memory tourism is an extension of the process of remembering’, while the narration of memories triggered by the encounter of personal memory sites enables the reconstruction and representation of one’s identity (Marschall, 2014, p. 337). Marschall (2012, 2015) draws on Tung & Ritchie’s (2011) proposal that narratives and storytelling are an important means of analyzing tourists’ memories of their experiences. Also explicitly confirmed by Cerulo (1997) and Moscardo (2010), the intimate connection between memory, narrative, and experience is depicted by Bendix (2002, p. 473) when stating: ‘The process of narrating the experience recovers the moment, if not its experiential singularity, and allows for its communicative restaging’. Thus, memory is not merely stored in the brain and retrieved, but always (re)constructed and mediated by socio-cultural factors, while the way individuals remember and narrate their memories invariably depends upon context, audience, and the way they want to define themselves at any given time (Marschall, 2014). In this way, ‘memory trips are a symbiosis between actual travel and mental time travel; they constitute both a type of relieving the past and a new experience that will, in turn, be

remembered' (Marschall, 2015, p. 40). The way memories of a trip or event are narrated might not match what actually happened, but they represent a reality in their own right and are essential to any research focused on the construction of identity in their ability to mirror the relationship between the self and others (Small, 2008). Highly relevant for the current study is Marschall's (2015) proposal that phenomenology is a highly appropriate avenue for a study whose constitutive elements are autobiographical memories and subjective experiences, as it enables the exploration of how individuals define their lived experiences, including emotions, intimacies, intensities, perceptions, beliefs, and memories, and how they assign meaning to them, while encouraging the researcher to accept individuals' subjective perceptions of phenomena as an undeniable part of their reality. All in all, Marschall (2012, 2014) clearly states that personal memory tourism cannot be classified as another niche type of tourism because it lacks recognizable shared patterns of organization and external practices, but, at most, can be seen as a form of tourism based on shared psychological attributes, emotions, and internal meanings. She goes on to argue that personal memory tourism is closely related to Timothy's (1997) 'personal heritage tourism' in their close association with identity, but conceptualizes the first as different to the latter in its individualistic, internalized, and idiosyncratic nature (Marschall, 2012, 2014). 'Compared to general heritage tourists, who are thought to be motivated by a quest for historical knowledge and the desire to connect with a shared past, those personally affected by that past seek to better understand their own remembered experience and explore their personal heritage and identity in places now considered part of the nation's or even the world's heritage' (Marschall, 2015, p. 38). The author also proposes the lack of direct experience of the tragic events to separate personal memory

tourism from dark tourism (Marschall, 2014). Although arguing for the individuality of the phenomenon, Marschall (2012, 2014) confusingly acknowledges the shared nature of many memories of trauma and the invariable interlink between individual memory and collective or ‘generational’ memory (Berger, 2002, p. 79). At this stage, the current study constructively breaks away from Marschall’s conceptualization of ‘personal memory tourism’. As discussed in the section 5.2 of the study, concepts such as Hirsch’s (1999) ‘postmemory’ and Landsberg’s (2004) ‘prosthetic memory’ describe personal, deeply felt memories of a traumatic past that the individual has not personally lived through, but are so strong that they become part of his/her own memory and identity. This development to Marschall’s theory is a fundamental underpinning to the current study’s objective of bringing together personal memory tourism and dark tourism into the conceptualization of *les milieux de mémoire sombre* and the investigation of how identity is constructed at such places.

The role of individual memory in the tourist experience has been explored, directly or indirectly, from different perspectives in the tourism academia (Winter, 2004; Braun-LaTour, Grinley, & Loftus, 2006; Braasch, 2008; Schwenkel, 2006, 2010; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011; Kim, 2014). Nevertheless, despite the rapid growth in tourism studies during the last three decades, Wright (2010, p. 117) argues that ‘[a] quick glance over the experiential-focused leisure and tourism literature suggests that very little has changed when it comes to our knowledge of producing and consuming memories of non-everyday >>lived<< experiences’. More precisely, the current study builds upon Wright’s (2010) acknowledgment of the general lack of research or understanding of how

personal meanings are attached to *post-trip* socially-constructed memories through the construction of personal narratives.

While understanding the need of phenomenological approaches to investigate post-trip autobiographical memories and narratives, the present study agrees with and adopts Marschall's (2012) understanding of memory as also being significantly important in the construction of the tourism landscape itself. As Morgan & Pritchard (2005, p. 41) contend: 'there is no perception of place and landscape without memory'. In a semiotic sense, tourism is understood by the collection of signs (Urry, 1990), which are imbued with meaning(s) through their existence within the framework of transgenerational social, cultural, and political memory thoroughly discussed before. Especially in places of collective suffering, their status of cultural symbols enables these signs to trigger memories and narration, thus being vital cogs in the intricate mechanism of constructing the identity *of* place and identity *with* place.

Based on these theories and backed up by the dyadic semiotic – phenomenological analysis, the current study proposes the following framework for understanding the memory – narrative – place identity – place construction nexus:

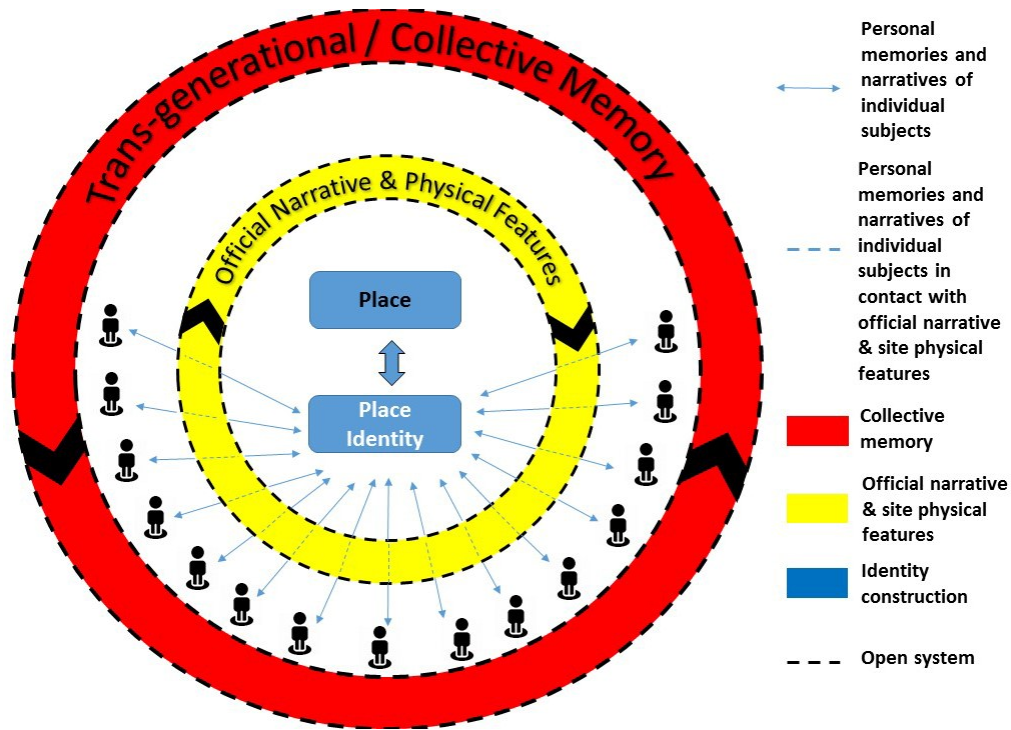


Figure 8 : The Memory – Narrative - Place Identity - Place Construction Nexus at *Les Milieux de Mémoire*

The model depicted in Figure 8 shows individuals having *post-trip* personal memories meaningfully transposed into personal narratives about their previous engagement with sites of Communist political repression such as the Sighet Memorial Museum or with the broader topic of Communist totalitarianism. Here, these personal memories and narratives come into contact with and are influenced by the materiality and official narratives of the site infused with a fluidity of shared signs, symbols, meanings, and ideology. From this constant interplay, the dyadic concept of place identity as identity *of* place and identity *with* place is born. And it is this process of infusing space with meaning(s) which (re)constructs place. The proposed model does not aim to reveal causal relations, but the fluidity of the experience and attribution of meaning. What keeps the elements together is the constant and open flow of transgenerational social, cultural, and

political memory previously discussed. The system is open because, as the literature and analysis in this study show, the promoted socio-cultural values and narrative tone prevailing in a society at a particular time depend on contemporaneous interests and trends. The framework brings together the supply and demand aspects of dark tourism to propose that the meaningfulness of visiting experience can be understood through the construction of place identity, which, in turn, depends on the site interpretation and materiality meeting visitors' *post-trip* personal memories and narratives in the process of identity-shaping.

The complexity of identity construction at places of memories associated with death and suffering - rooted in all the factors discussed above - invites a multi-dimensional approach of interpreting the integration between identity *with* place and identity *of* place. Already discussed in the literature review, the current study attempts to investigate this dyadic connection by adopting Brockmeier's (2002) three orders of narrative integration.

5.1.2 The Linguistic Order of Narrative Integration

The semiotic and IPA analyses confirm the existential nature of humans as 'storytelling animals' (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 201), or *homo narrans* (Fisher, 1984). More precisely, meanings are attributed to the investigated topic in the form of narratives which are articulated and exchanged during the process of storytelling with the purpose of interpreting and transmitting experiences, as suggested by Polkinghorne (1988) and Chronis (2012a). Both the identity *of* place and identity *with* place are constructed when different experiential aspects are encapsulated into a complex narrative plot. This is what

Brockmeier (2002) called *narrative as a linguistic order*. In terms of the identity of place, the semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum reveals the existence of an official master narrative ('The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance') which is comprised of a series of thematic sub-narratives (eg. 'Maps Room', 'The Romania of the Prisons', 'The Communist Assault on Maramureș. Case Study: Ilie Lazăr') arranged according to a certain chronology (rooms 1 to 87). This is confirmed by two museum authorities in the IPA section of the study. Mr. Fürtös – curator at the Sighet Memorial Museum, portrait 7 – states that: 'The presentation and interpretation are rather classic. [...] What we have in place is a mix of chronology and thematic sub-themes.' Similarly, Mr. Kondrat – tour guide at the Sighet Memorial Museum, portrait 8 – mentions that: 'I always tend to adapt my narrative to the visitors, according to their age, level of interest, and so on. It is a mixture of chronological and thematic narrative.' Regarding identity *with* place, the phenomenological portraits expose that each participant integrates certain themes, life stories, and techniques into a complex narrative plot when making sense of the investigated topic and site. Their allocation of meaning comes to confirm Rickly-Boyd's (2010, p. 261) understanding of narrative as 'a construction that is not only ordered sequentially to highlight significant events, but moves beyond the time frame of the individual life course to connect familial, national, and institutional narratives in an ongoing narrative construction of the self'. Indeed, as the phenomenological portraits clearly show, all participants adjoin personal, familial, (inter)national, and institutional (e.g., government, church, workplace, museal and research institutions) existential pieces into what they perceive to be a coherent and meaningful identitarian bricolage. This pattern is mirrored in the construction of the master narrative at the Sighet Memorial

Museum. The constructions of both identity *with* place and identity *of* place transcend spatial and temporal borders. For example, narratives can connect the 1918 reunification of Romania to the interwar generations, to the coming to power of the Communist regime, to different periods of Communist totalitarianism, to the 1989 Revolution, and to different periods post-1989. In most cases, such a national temporality is intermingled with a personal temporality which usually spans across generations from ancestors, grandparents, parents, to one's birth, childhood, education, profession, key life moments, and thoughts about the future. Adding to this is a spatiality which is attributed meaning on different scales, such as one's birthplace, locations of education and work, Sighet, Bucharest (the capital city), places of detention across Romania, and international places of totalitarian repression. All these aspects are brought together in intricate experiential constructions of temporality and spatiality which infuse the historicity of human existence with cultural meaning (Carrithers, 1991; Brockmeier, 1995, 2002). What ensures this identitarian temporality and spatiality in its role as a storehouse of transgenerational collective memory is narrative language (French, 2012). This is because the narrative language has the power to create places and bonds between people and place by providing visitors with metanarratives of national significance (Tuan, 1991; Stokowski, 2002; Rickly-Boyd, 2010). Thus, what supports the construction of the identity *with* place and identity *of* place at the Sighet Memorial Museum, and meaningfully connects the two identitarian aspects is the Romanian language. These identitarian constructions are possible because – as Brockmeier (2002) suggests – narrative and narrative language have the fundamental potential of being capable of playing different roles: cognitive, emotional, and social. From the cognitive perspective, the Romanian language allows the

museum authorities to develop and communicate a master narrative which transmits a coherent and intended message. It also enables all the study participants to interpret and articulate perceptions about the investigated topic and site in ways they consider pertinent, relevant, coherent, and meaningful. From the emotional perspective, the master narrative at the Sighet Memorial Museum was designed with the declared purpose of triggering emotional and transformational reactions. In the words of the museum developers - Ana Blandiana and Romulus Rusan - the Sighet Memorial project is 'an attack on inertia and against a collective mentality which prefers to indulge itself in guilty indifference, instead of going through the painful process of discovering its past', while 'the obsessions of collective suffering and guilt cannot be erased through oblivion or indifference, but through research, analysis and comprehension' (cited in Tănăsioiu, 2008). Their words are reinforced by the museum curator – Mr. Fürtös, portrait 7 – and by the former director of the Sighet Memorial Museum – Mr. Bârlea, portrait 13. Linked to the semiotic order of narrative integration discussed below, Romanian language empowers the museum developers to infuse the materiality of the former Sighet Penitentiary with the symbols, messages, and meanings needed for triggering the intended reactions. In turn, the Romanian language also enables the participants to acknowledge, interpret, and articulate a wide variety of emotional reactions stirred by the interaction with researched topic and site, as can be seen in each phenomenological portrait and the cross-case identitarian synthesis (section 4.2.2). Lastly, from a social perspective, the Romanian language is understood as a fundamental and constitutive element of the Romanian identity. O'Reilly (2003, p. 20) argues that 'the connection between language, ethnicity and culture can be seen so >>natural<< that it passes without comment unless challenged'. The Romanian

language is perceived as the storehouse of Romanianness and Romanian Common Knowledge which enables the participants to suture their personal experiences to both the master narrative of the Sighet Memorial Museum and the investigated topic. Building on her previous work, Späti (2016, p. 5) concludes that ‘language is closely linked to culture and appears not only as a key marker of collective identity but also as something that has a great impact on other identity markers’. Indeed, following Brockmeier’s (2002) *linguistic order* of narrative integration, the Romanian language is proposed as the fundamental and essential identitarian glue holding together the pieces which comprise the identity *with* place and identity *of* place at the Sighet Memorial Museum.

5.1.3 The Semiotic Order of Narrative Integration

Moving on to the *semiotic order of narrative integration*, the semiotic and IPA analyses confirm the fact that tourism academia investigating the tourist experience can no longer evade the ‘*inescapable hybridity of >>human<< and >>nonhuman<< worlds*’ (Thrift, 1996, cited in Haldrup & Larsen’s, 2006, p. 276). The semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum reveals that the visiting experience at sites of dark heritage is both fully imbued with and capitalizes on collective memory. The entire experience at the Sighet Memorial Museum takes place within the frame of cultural, social, and political memory previously referred to as Romanianness, which infuses the experience with meaning that is critically assumed to trigger place identity. Generally speaking, the study proposes that from the moment individuals step into life they are subjected to a continuous process of memory accumulation, negotiation, and diffusion as they encounter different

lifeworlds of memory, such as family, school, church, neighborhood, or nation. One could even argue that an individual is tributary to a certain system schemata of transgenerational memory from the moment of his/her conception, as no one can freely choose the geographical, economic, political or socio-cultural environment to be born in. The memories and symbolic meanings shared by the members of a group ensure a certain interpretive commonality (Blumer, 1969; Milligan, 1988), which, in transforms such groups into ‘symbolic communities’ (Hunter, 1974). Moreover, throughout their existence in a social place, individuals transpose memories into narratives, which they subsequently follow, share, negotiate in a continuous process of meaning-making and identity-shaping. As already mentioned above, the declared purpose of the museum developers for designing the current version of the museum interpretation was to trigger certain emotional and transformational reactions focused on identitarian regeneration. As the semiotic reading of the site shows, the physical features and the interpretive installation on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum are imbued in Romanian Common Knowledge and strong feelings of individual and collective suffering. These meaning-infused signs and symbols are laid out along storylines which comprise the master narrative or the identity *of* place. In turn, the IPA analysis reveals that the encounter with the investigated topic and site triggers autobiographical memories for all participants. Autobiographical memories are exposed as the main tool employed by participants in their meaning-making processes, and they comprise the identity *with* place. Importantly, as table 3 shows, the autobiographical memories narrated by all 24 participants touch upon at least two out of the four constitutive elements of Romanianness. From this perspective, narrative is fundamental in meaningfully shaping the experience with the

Sighet Memorial Museum by integrating autobiographical memory and the symbolic mediation of the official master narrative and site materiality into an identitarian framework, while, at the same time, binding individuals to one another by allowing for a continuous flow of transgenerational shared memory. In other words, narrative is the essential bridge between the identity *with* place and identity *of* place. Such an identitarian merging activates a wide variety of consonant and dissonant emotional reactions, as synthesized in section 4.2.2. This comes to reflect and reinforce the fact that Uzzell and Ballantyne's (1998) concept of 'hot interpretation' discussed in the literature review is specific to sites of dark heritage. Instances of unjust fratricide death and suffering are omnipresent across the Sighet Memorial Museum, culminating in the *in situ* remains of Sighet victims at the Paupers' Cemetery. The feature of being developed *in situ* – in the building of the former Sighet Penitentiary - makes the Sighet Memorial Museum a site *of* death (Miles, 2002), and positions it at the darkest end of Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum as a 'dark camp of genocide'. According to Young (1989, p. 64), *in situ* dark heritage sites 'are devastating in their impact - not just for what they remember but because they compel the visitor to accept the horrible fact that what they show is >>real<<.' This confirms Light's (2017, p. 289) conclusion that dark tourism has become 'one of a number of contemporary institutions [...] that mediate between (or connect) the living and the dead'. Combined with the strong archaic and Christian symbolic and ritualistic meanings attached to death, burial, afterlife, and ancestral veneration in Romanian culture, it is critically assumed that the Sighet Memorial Museum *in situ* characteristics trigger strong emotions within and among Romanian visitors. This assumption is confirmed by the fact that all participants attribute meaning to the

researched topic and site by narrating – in different emotion-infused expressive means – instances of death and suffering under totalitarianism. The importance of this *in situ* nature is emphasized by participants such as Mr. Constantinescu, Mr. Preda, Mr. Voinaghi, Mr. Mureșan, Mrs. Hașu, Mr. Puric, Mr. Tudor-Popescu, and The Visitor. In particular, The Visitor articulates a wide variety of inner experiences and emotions triggered by the interaction with the *in situ* interpretive features of the Sighet Memorial Museum, as synthesized in section 4.2.2. The ability to connect emotionally to a master narrative by consciously or unconsciously attributing symbolic meaning to the exhibits in a place of national dark heritage is directly linked to Brockmeier's (2002) *semiotic order of narrative integration*. This comes close to Hummon's (1986, p. 34) definition of place identity as 'an interpretation of the self that uses place as a sign or locus of identity'.

5.1.4 The Performative or Discursive Order of Narrative Integration

The semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum reconfirms previous findings by scholars such as Geertz (1973) and Giddens (1984) according to which symbolic behavior is never free-floating, but constituted within frames of social, cultural and political memory which shape collective activity. From the entrance, visitors follow a clearly marked narrative trajectory which rarely gives opportunities for independent wondering around the site. This is clearly connected to Brockmeier's (2002) *performative or discursive order of narrative integration*. The site reflects the developers' intent of constructing a specific master narrative by selecting the suitable means and events, arranging them in a certain order, and connecting them in a coherent and meaningful way

to achieve their declared goal of stirring emotional and transformational reactions focused on identitarian regeneration. On-site participant observation reveals the fact that people tend to follow this narrative route and, thus, to legitimize the master narrative on display. As previously mentioned, the existential concept of ‘following’ – defined by Braid (1996, p. 6) as an ‘ongoing process in which the listener repeatedly tries to integrate the unfolding narrative and the dynamics of performance into a coherent and meaningful interpretation of what happened’ – is fundamental toward understanding narrative as a co-construction.

Analyzing the performative ‘following’, meaningful identitarian bonds arise from the individuals’ participation in distinct cultural-semiotic activities, where meaning is made through signs from the ‘bodily automatisms and ritual performances’ (Connerton, 1989, pp. 4-5). Following in the footsteps of Foster (1991) and Hoelscher & Alderman (2004), repetitive and performative cultural practices and rituals at the Sighet Memorial Museum, such as making the sign of the cross, lighting up candles, saying prayers, and laying wreaths along a prescribed route, or taking part in masses, commemorative events and pilgrimages at predetermined dates are believed to legitimize a collective identity – Romanianness – as citizens physically enact what is appropriate for a group in a specific setting. Based on the work of Till (2004) and Winter (2008), it can be argued that these practices are consciously or unconsciously triggered by the social, cultural and political schemes of memory in which they happen, and, in turn, they reinforce it. Tuan (1976, p. 23) labels the socio-cultural obligation to remember and honor their war dead and to visit their burial places as *geopieté*, and argues that ‘geopious feelings are still with us as attachment to place, love of country, and patriotism’. He goes on to propose that modern

societies attribute meanings of sacrality to sites which contain the remains of national heroes: ‘The spirits of the dead have power, the burial places of heroes and saints are holy ground. A grove is sacred because it belongs to some goddess, a mountain is sacred because it is the dwelling of the gods, and a piece of ground is sacred because the bones or ashes of a hero are buried in it’ (Tuan, 1976, p. 23). His words are mirrored by the vast majority of the participants in the current study who – as the phenomenological portraits and table 3 show – associate archaic and religious meanings to the former Sighet Prison turned into a memorial museum. At the heart of geopiety - Tuan (1976) argues - lies reciprocity, which implies that the victims of conflict or repression have given their lives to protect the nation. Winter (2009) confirms that this societal tendency of perceiving cemeteries and memorials as shrines or sacred places has perpetuated into contemporaneity. Combined with the strong archaic and Christian symbolic and ritualistic meanings attached to death, burial, afterlife, and ancestral veneration in Romanian culture, it is critically assumed that the Sighet Memorial Museum *in situ* characteristics trigger strong emotions within and among Romanian visitors. This is particularly visible in the context of The Visitor who – as seen in section 4.2.2 – attributes a wide variety of vivid, intimate, and almost tangible meanings to the *in situ* nature of the Sighet Memorial Museum. In turn, these meanings are frequently linked to a perceived sacrifice assumed by the former political prisoners in the name of Romanian identitarian and Christian roots for the benefit of present and future generations. Nevertheless, commemoration and memorialization become especially controversial in places of dissonant heritage which involve memories of trauma, atrocity, and violence (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996; Rivera, 2008; Winter, 2009). Although public remembrance of authority is a necessary

tool for social compensation, moral reflection, and public education, it is nevertheless a difficult topic because it requires identifying victims, perpetrators, and heroes (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). This is clearly exemplified in the cross-case synthesis presented in section 4.2.2 which shows a series of examples of dissonant perceptions and contrasting emotional reactions triggered by the interaction with the investigated topic and site.

The IPA analysis reveals the participants as dynamically engaged in a dialogue with the investigated topic and site by means of autobiographical memories. In this context, remembering is the capability of ‘forming meaningful narrative sequences’ (Connerton, 1989, p. 26). They participate in meaning co-creation by filling the narrative gaps and combining individual parts into a unified and coherent whole through means they consider relevant and appropriate. In so doing, they ‘follow’ and suture themselves to the master narrative by accepting, negotiating, or rejecting the interpretation on display (Light, 2017). Rickly-Boyd (2010) proposes that meaningful identitarian bonds between visitors and heritage sites are reflected by and (re)inforced through forming connections, experiencing space, (re)creating and (re)living memories, and (re)telling and (re)interpreting site narratives. As the 24 phenomenological portraits show, each participant attributes meaning to the researched topic and site in his/her own personalized way based on one’s collateral information, as suggested by Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland (2007). However, in close connection to the linguistic and semiotic orders of narrative integration, there are certain unspoken institutionalized commonalities in the attribution of meaning among those commonly socialized by family, culture, and history (Knudsen, Soper, & Metro-Roland, 2007). In the current study, Romanianness – the container of Romanian Common Knowledge – was developed as such a framework of

(un)spoken commonalities rooted in transgenerational shared memory. Since the semiotic reading has revealed the Sighet Memorial Museum to be soaked in elements of Romanianness, the current study develops the table below in order to investigate possible narrative meeting points between the participants' autobiographical memories triggered by the investigated topic and the cultural materiality and master narrative on display at the Sighet Memorial Museum. Based on the literature review, it is assumed that place identity is constructed in the interactive process between identity *with* place and identity *of* place. More precisely, it is proposed that each participant meaningfully sutures himself to the master narrative and cultural materiality of the Sighet Memorial Museum if his/her autobiographical memories triggered by the interaction with the researched topic and site touch upon at least one of the four pillars of Romanian Common Knowledge comprising Romanianness. This is what Brockmeier (2002) referred to as the *discursive order of narrative integration*.

Table 3: Bridging between ‘Identity *with* Place’ and ‘Identity *of* Place’

ROMANIANNES	Archaic Thought & Lifestyle	Orthodox Christianity	Communist Thought & Lifestyle	Post-1989 Thought & Lifestyle
PARTICIPANTS	Example	Example	Example	Example
1. Mr Ion Iliescu	<p><i>‘One year after being released from prison, my dad suffered a heart attack and passed away. He was 44 years old in 1945. I was 15 at the time. I grew up without a father. For the most part of my childhood my father was in prison. [...] I had my father around just for a little time. I was a child when he was arrested, I witnessed his trial and then I went on the trail of the prisons - Jilava, Caracal, Târgu Jiu, Lagăr - together with my mother, until she also entered illegality and became a suspect to the Siguranță. [...] In 1942, she was forced to leave the house and I was left with an aunt, a sister of my dad, for three years during the war. I was a kid. [...] In ’44 the family was reunited when my dad was released from prison. This is when I enrolled in daytime classes in the Spiru Haret high-school.</i></p>		<p><i>‘I was born in the family of a railway worker. He had joined the syndicate in the 1920s. In 1931 he took part in the 5th Congress of the Communist Party and became a member. So, in the context of those times, he became a suspect individual since the Communist Party was illegal. [...]. The Communist period also had positive things, not only bad ones. For example, those were the times when changing the status of the nation from an eminently rural one was decided upon. An industry was set in place which gave the nation a whole new foundation.’</i></p>	<p><i>‘It is the natural evolution in an open and democratic environment which has been a characteristic of our evolution ever since the 1989 Revolution. Unfortunately, after 2004, instead of moving forward we confronted other problems. [...] Good things were done, but the country cannot keep up with the competition caused by foreign capital which dominates the economic market. [...] There are some damned flaws of capital holders who try to impose their own interests. [...] We must treat the Revolution as a historical moment which changed the fate of the country and of the people. It opened the nation to the world and to the natural process taking place all around us. [...] Something was built, and this can be perfected. The duty of each generation is to add</i></p>

	<i>In less than one year, my father passed away’.</i>			<i>something extra to this foundation...for the better! It is not always possible, but life is like this.’</i>
2. Mr Emil Constantinescu	<i>‘The goal was clear: to destroy the memory of the Romanian nation! If you destroy a man’s memory, you destroy his identity! A person who has lost his memory does not exist anymore as an individual. A nation who have lost their memory does not exist anymore! So, the memory of Romania had to be destroyed to create the New Man! It was a diabolical planning! In Sighet they broke the connection to the past, while in Pitești they re-educated the students through torture to abjure their past, their families, their faith to create the New Man.’</i>	<i>‘Many of my mentors were also persecuted. I was baptized at the New Neamț Monastery. My godfather was Constantin Tomescu, who was the Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Chișinău. [...] I was baptized by two priests. One of them called Țepordei crossed the border and sought refuge in Romania. He was arrested by the Securitate and sent to Siberia for having published some articles against Stalin. He suffered terribly!’</i>	<i>‘I have memories from when I was five years old and we had again to seek refuge against the Red Army. I remember the cattle wagons, the troops. On our return, we saw that many in Bessarabia had been killed, sent to Siberia, much had been destroyed. We knew directly what many did not know. My family knew from the beginning what the Red Army means. [...] I was seven years old and I remember my father coming home one day and telling us that – with the removal of Rădescu from power – the Communists would do what they had done in Russia and that hard times were upon us. [...] From day one I stated clearly that no one who had previously worked in the Securitate, cooperated with the Securitate, been member of the Communist</i>	<i>‘Today’s Romania is in a real and measurable progress. This progress is linked to vital issues of our entire history. It is for the first time in its history when the Romanian nation has its independence, freedom, and integrity secured. Romania has never been better militarily protected by a big power. But, of course, freedom and integrity are like health: when you have them, you take them for granted. The second aspect is democracy. Romania is not in a political crisis. The democratic institutions exist, but it took a couple of decades for them to start working. We cannot say we do not live in a democratic regime, with its own flaws. Neither are we in an economic crisis like other European nations have experienced. According to</i>

			<p>nomenclature, or a Communist activist would not be hired in the presidential apparatus. There is a published study showing how the apparatus under President Iliescu was full of former Communists, then my apparatus had zero former Communists, and then again President Iliescu brought them into action. [...] In one of my previous speeches I openly asked for the condemnation of the Communist ideology.'</p>	<p>EU calculations, we have the highest economic growth for two years in a row. Then we ask ourselves: why this generalized state of discontent? Because Romania is going through a profound moral crisis. This is caused by the abandonment of moral values and scarcity of role models. [...] After Communism, one had to learn the behaviors of those who got rich on the back of the regime and this led to the decay of the people. And within lies the moral drama of the Romanian society. Before, people condemned the snobbism of wealthy people. But at least snobbism spreads some positive values. But today's model is the thug, the ill-bred. The society is paying a price for this.'</p>
3. Mr Vasile Ciolpan		<p>'I told my superiors they have not allocated any wooden planks to me, so I had to beg for such planks to the local factory to make coffins for them. [...] I fulfilled my duty as a human being, as a soul</p>	<p>'I felt I entered a situation I should not have put myself into. But now it was too late already. [...] Many abusive things – from top to bottom – took place in those days. Such was the situation. And</p>	

		<p><i>of a kind human, as I was pitying them sometimes. [...] I have a clean conscience. I may have done some mistakes, I do not know. But I have a clean conscience and always have a relaxed sleep.'</i></p>	<p><i>some people around here respected ordered word by word, without questioning them. [...] When one of them died, I announced it to the Direction for Penitentiaries in Bucharest. We would say >>the light bulb in cell # went off<<. We could not say the names of the deceased under any circumstance. This was the situation. [...] Once they interrogated Mihalache and he ended up spending three days in the >>black<< cell. Why? I could not say. It was decided by the interrogation squad. [...] There was no window and almost no air. Only through the space under the door. It was hard for them. When this guy, Mihalache, was locked in the >>black<< cell, I found him on the cell floor with his mouth by the door.'</i></p>	
4. Mrs Trifoi		<p><i>'They made coffins out of wooden planks. They made coffins at daytime and removed the bodies at night-time. They buried them in that place where Iuliu Maniu</i></p>	<p><i>'When Dej got ill, my husband came home and told me: >>our daddy is sick!<<. This is how he called Dej: >>our daddy<<. He really believed in Communism and</i></p>	

		<p>is buried. [...] One night a prisoner passed away. His cell mate asked my husband to let him pray for the deceased overnight. My husband agreed but told that prisoner to tell absolutely no one – especially the commander or the political commissar – about this. [...] They thanked my husband for allowing him to pray for the deceased. My husband told me that never before and never after has he heard such prayers as those in the cell!’</p>	<p>in Dej. He was very upset when he died. Very, very upset. [...] Before the Communists came to power, the Hungarians were here. They allocated certain amounts of food per family. We had to speak Hungarian in schools. [...] The Communists did not like faith.’</p>	
5. Mrs Ana Blandiana	<p>‘I can say I was close to the phenomenon of the Communist political prisons since I was born. I remember witnessing the first arrest of my dad. He was arrested on several occasions. He was only convicted once for seven years and died soon after. They would sometimes take him in, keep him for some time and let him go.’</p>	<p>‘My father was a priest and had already been arrested for >>propaganda against the state<<. [...] Meeting Catharine Lalumière was the work of a little angel. [...] Without my belief in God I would not have achieved anything. I am not superstitious, but I have the absolute belief that I am protected. [...] We have been strongly attacked from both left and right political wings on the one hand, and from both the Orthodox and the</p>	<p>‘The objective of the projects we have here is for as many people as possible to find out what the Communist repression actually was. [...] What happened in Pitești is unimaginable to a normal mind. In this experience, almost all were victims and aggressors.’</p>	<p>‘Having spoken to the students gathered in the Revolution Square in 1990, I soon realized that we were back in the pre-1989 political atmosphere. [...] When the miners came and committed the atrocious actions against the students, we got the idea to call for a public meeting in support of the arrested and killed students. [...] The children and heirs of the ex-Communist leaders were still dominating the country. Nowadays it is still the same,</p>

		<p><i>Catholic Churches on the other hand. This dispute between the Churches is tearing me apart. Not only because my dad was a priest and his best friend was a Greek-Catholic priest who died in prison. [...] When we sought the support of the Orthodox Patriarchy, we were informed that they cannot help us because those who suffered in prison did not suffer for Christ, but for their political ideas. They are absolutely shameless! The Catholic Metropolitan Seat in Blaj did not even send us a reply!'</i></p>		<p><i>but the network has shifted from political to corruption-based. [...] Not forgetting this side of history allows us to better understand the present.'</i></p>
6. Mr Romulus Rusan	<p><i>'My father was arrested in 1948 until 1956. [...] For Romania, Communism meant a brutal exit from normality, from the national traditional way of living. Romanians were crushed by the enforcement of an extreme-left ideology. They had been a traditionalist peasants' nation driven by a strong and profound belief in God. To this we can add an antipathy</i></p>	<p><i>'My grandfather had been an Orthodox archpriest, he took part in the Great Union of 1918. [...] God tested our faith and hope, but always helped us in the end. We could not be saved without faith in God, hope, and love. The same is happening with the Sighet Memorial.</i></p>	<p><i>'Many of our professors who had been part of the previous regime were fired – some arrested – by the Communists. [...] Her father had also been imprisoned by the Communists, so she had to write under a pseudonym. After some time, people realized who she was and that her father had been a political prisoner. The Communists sent a</i></p>	<p><i>'Many opportunists appeared from the former Communist cadres. All the privatizations post-1989 were done based on social origin, more precisely they were done by former Communist cadres and their relatives and friends. [...] It saddens me to see how we keep beating around the bush, while the former Communist nomenclaturists,</i></p>

	<p>towards the Russian Empire based on previous campaigns of occupation.</p>		<p>notification to all universities and literary magazines informing them about her. In the end, she could no longer publish in >>Tribuna<<. They even warned me against marrying her! They also told her to break up with me, or she would destroy me! So, we ended up marrying in secrecy in 1960! [...] We knew of the infamous prison in Sighet where the elite of Romania had been exterminated, just like we knew of others such as Aiud, Gherla, Pitești, or Jilava. [...] What followed was a savage and bloody terror, with almost two million Romanians arrested, deported, or used as slaves for forced labor. Plus, hundreds of thousands of captured soldiers were deported to Siberia.</p>	<p>their heirs, grandsons, rivals and supporters move on laughing at the discord among democrats. The former torturers move around confidently and defy democracy using its unlimited freedoms. [...] In times when the rule of law is shaken by politics, populism, and corruption, memory is a solid anchor which secures our place in history. [...] The great personalities of the past are replaced with VIPs of the contemporary political and entertainment scene. The >>people<< is replaced by an abstract >>civic society<< rooted more in the wooden language than in life itself. [...] We are running the risk of becoming – from this post-1989 second generation – a nation without memory, fed with entertainment, speaking a wooden language, who gives all its sensuality to the Internet. Practically, memory is left behind by the entertainment provided</p>
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				<i>through all means of communication, by the youngsters' superficial view of life, and by their parents' hardships which turn memory into a matter of secondary importance.'</i>
7. Mr Robert Fürtös	<i>'First it is the refusal of people to give their land up for collectivization, then it is the strong resistance of the Greek-Catholic Church, plus the direct armed resistance...all of this suffering affects you! [...] First it is the refusal of people to give their land up for collectivization, then it is the strong resistance of the Greek-Catholic Church, plus the direct armed resistance...all of this suffering affects you!'</i>	<i>'[...] we have an exhibition room focused on the repression against the Church in general. We have included the Greek-Catholic and Orthodox Churches. There are always questions on why we chose both, why we did not choose one over the others.'</i>	<i>'I specialized in recent history with a special interest in the Communist repression. [...] Each story is terrible in itself! While I was doing my field research in this area I realized the oppression takes on different aspects and layers. [...] In some cases, the stories were so terrible that I chose to stop the recording, I could not make my interviewee relieve the suffering again.'</i>	<i>'Another group of Romanian visitors are the children and students who, sadly, seem to know less and less about the Communist times. It is not their fault, but the system's. There are too little history courses in schools and I heard they plan to reduce them further. [...] 'I believe this history can provide young people with real role models, rather than those promoted as models by today's media. I am not talking just about politicians who chose to die rather than give up their values. I am also talking about women who suffered because they refused to divorce, I am talking about farmers who suffered because they provided support to the resistance fighters, or representatives of</i>

				<i>the clergy who never gave up their faith. The young people should know they are coming from somewhere, that this nation had a dignified past and dignified people.'</i>
8. Mr Norbert Kondrat	<i>'We are already on the second generation who is not taught about the Communist regime and their crimes, so the fading national identity we are facing nowadays is understandable. [...] Many students have not even heard about Maniu!'</i>		<i>'I remember queuing up with my parents for the gas and food quotas before 1989. I graduated from the >>Dragoș Vodă<< high-school in Sighetu Marmăției in 2001. In high-school they taught me almost nothing about the history of Communist repression. [...] The middle-aged visitors already know what I am talking about. Some lived through the Communist times or at least read more on the topic. [...] One should like to question not just Communism, but all aspects of everyday life!'</i>	<i>'The history of Communist repression is not taught in schools because of a general lack of interest developed over the last 25 years. The methods and topics are the same as in the time of Ceaușescu, and so are many educators. [...] Educators in primary and secondary schools do not have autonomy to choose what they teach. The curriculum is developed by the Ministry of Education. [...] The youngsters – especially in primary and secondary school – seem completely disinterested. It is very hard to make them feel how life in prison really was. Most of them do not even know where their educators brought them! They tend to take a couple of photos and that is it! Few seem affected by what</i>

				<p><i>they see! [...] No other museums except for Sighet have been built after 1989 because of an absolute disinterest from the political class! Most politicians have been interested in getting rich, and they had nothing to earn from developing a museum. They obtain state positions for business purposes, not for improving the lives of the people. Plus, many used to cadres of the Communist regime. [...] They must be convicted and shown to the people as criminals for confirming the worth of living in a democratic nation! It is still the best form of government mankind has been able to develop by now!'</i></p>
9. Mr Ioan Ilban	<p><i>'Every day we saw women whose husbands were probably imprisoned at Gherla. They were pretending to light up candles in the cemetery, but their eyes were pointed at the prison cells in hope of spotting out their husbands.</i></p>	<p><i>'They realized that Church and individual freedom are not possible in a Communist state. The sphere of independence is very narrow. You cannot speak freely, you cannot act freely, you can only say and do what you are told and manipulated to say</i></p>	<p><i>'You can imagine how much fear entered my heart during the 40-something years of Communism I lived through...and the way I lived them! [...] First, they started questioning the chatty guy, then they put a sack over his head and began turning him</i></p>	<p><i>'They must know it! Otherwise such things may happen again. Under no circumstance do I wish for the horrors committed by the Communist regime to happen again!'</i></p>

	<p><i>One cell mate told me looking through the window to a village far away: >>do you know I can see the roof of my house from here? If only my parents knew I am here<<. I never met this man after, but I cannot forget this feeling he shared with me. He could see his house, his village! Our families had no idea about our fate, we had absolutely no correspondence! They did not know where we are, if we are still alive!'</i></p>	<p><i>or do. [...] At the end of August, we were sent to the Văcărești Prison in Bucharest. It used to be a monastery, but the Communists turned it into a prison. [...] I prayed to God that I would one day look from my village to the prison rather than from the prison to my village. [...] After liberation I remembered seeing the Țibleș Mountains from the window of the prison and praying to God I would one day look the other way around. In that moment I prayed to God from the bottom of my heart. A prayer for myself and for those who were still behind bars.'</i></p>	<p><i>around and hitting him badly. Blood started coming out through the sack. He shouted at first, but, at some point, he started laughing. That is when they stopped hitting him. The whole act had been planned by the prison authorities. They took him out of the cell and we never saw him again. After many years we heard that he eventually lost his mind completely. [...] Meanwhile, people who had been imprisoned in the Soviet camps started returning to their homes and telling others what they had lived in the USSR, what Communism means, and what living in a Communist state involves. [...] I was moved to the large cell, cell 101. [...] In this room we had to sit down from morning to night in one position, without the ability to support our body on anything. After one month I could no longer feel my bottom, legs and spine. If we changed position any way we</i></p>	
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			<i>got hit with clubs. To not be hit over the head, we stretched out our hands. After a while we could no longer feel our palms. I really felt I would not walk out of this cell alive!'</i>	
10. Mr Octav Bjoza	<i>'No doubt about it, what saved most of us was the belief in God and the image of the loved ones waiting for us to return home.'</i>	<i>'He takes a few more steps and says: >>And know one more thing! Here there is only one God!<< I look around and I see members of all cults and sects. A few moments later he tells me again: >>God? Do you know what God is? God is the victory of Good over Evil, the victory of Light over Darkness, the victory of Beauty over Ugliness. Do not think about the beauty of the body, but the beauty of the soul. God is Nature itself, with her laws and phenomena. God is the big infinity, God is the small infinity. God is everywhere, my boy, God is in you. You will look for Him your entire life and will not be able to find Him. But my advice is to never stop searching for</i>	<i>,At the end of my first year of university studies I was expelled and arrested by the Securitate. Between 1956-1958 I had been part of the >>Guard of the Romanian Youth<< anti-Communist organization whose purpose was the >>violent removal of the popular democratic regime from our country<<. [...] I am one of the few who passed through 14 headquarters of the Securitate, prisons and labour camps over four years. Goiciu told us: >>only those of you who are still standing when reaching the second gate can expect to get out of here alive<<. The guards were hitting us with clubs, metal door handles and other items. [...] I was focusing on the much more</i>	<i>'I am an Orthodox, and I am ashamed to have a patriarch who used to be a colonel for the Service of External Information! And metropolitans who used to inform people to the secret police! The clergy has a contract with God which does not involve any documents or signing but with an infinitely heavier weight than any other contract. [...] Nowadays I am feeling ashamed of how humiliated we have been especially for the last five-six years by the heirs of the criminals who convicted us before and of those who knew about this and kept silent. [...] There is still a fight going on because those giving laws and ruling the country today are the heirs of</i>

		<p>Him!<< How could I ever forget this individual?! I cannot forget him! I am still his follower. This is the God that saved me!’ [...] It seems I have good connections with God, I have sent my forerunners to keep a good place for me in the front row and to the right side of the Father, as I have never been a leftist. [...] I go to the Sighet Memorial just like going to a sacred temple, to a sanctuary.’</p>	<p>terrible pains other people were going through. Their finger nails were pulled out with pliers, their teeth were pulled out, their fingers were crushed in door frames, they were tied to wooden sticks and rotated like a pig on a spit while hit with clubs or beaten over the testicles with a school ruler until turning blue.’</p>	<p>the criminals who convicted us before. [...] The youth should know this history because many of those preaching to them about democracy and giving life lessons are the criminals from the Communist regime, whose real contemporary concern is robbing this nation. They have taken Romania to the worst possible misery, while a bunch got filthy rich!’</p>
11. Mr Radu Preda	<p>‘My family had to move from one city to another and start anew after my grandfather was forced to sign that he donates all his properties to the state. He had no political affiliation, but he was wealthy. Some of those he used to hire for temporary jobs took him to the forest one day, put a gun at his head and asked him to choose: >>Donate everything, or we shoot you!<< Later, my mother was expelled from the Faculty of Law because she had >>unhealthy origins<<.</p>	<p>‘Christianity is unique not just through the law of love, but also through the law of memory. So, what the Athenians were fiercely debating about should be clear to a Christian from day one: that memory has a therapeutic, preventive, and constructive role. [...] Divine justice does not block worldly justice. In both the New and Old Testament, we have instances of worldly justice. Some are clear acts of injustice, such as the liberation of a bandit –</p>	<p>‘[...] we must develop this museum of Communist crimes as a hard core, as the tip of a drill which, in time, will bite more and more from the social conscience! [...] Beyond empathy and the wave of revolt cause by the cruelty and gratuity of these crimes, what surprised me the most in all testimonials was the discrepancy between the means of the regime and the weakness and inefficiency of the people who comprised the regime. A regime afraid of a young person who writes</p>	<p>‘This country is messed up! [...] Plus, dialectics such as >>Communism killed us in beatings, but they also gave us apartments, water, and elevators<<. I am asking many: was it worth getting water, elevators, and public illumination if this meant killing the nation’s elite, poisoning its language, disfiguring its history, falsifying its esthetic, literary, and value canon?! [...] The times before and after the 1989 Revolution are incomparable! Those</p>

	<p><i>[...] In 2018 we will celebrate 100 years since the reunification of Great Romania - a Great Romania still not as great as it was 100 years ago. Out of these 100 years, almost three quarters are not depicted in museums. They are not filtered through museographical speech.'</i></p>	<p><i>Barabbas, and the strictly ideological and interested condemnation of an innocent - Christ. It is clearly therapeutic because, when you remember your sins, you have the possibility to heal. It can bring reconciliation between you and others. It can prevent future explosions of hatred. It can also be a constructive element, as the sum of negative memories can help us build a better future. After trauma, after schism, after your own sins, you reenter your spiritual life strengthened and wiser. So, for Christian theology, memory is not a possibility, it is not voluntary. The church life is profoundly memorial! [...] It is what we, the Christians, have as a bad example at the Church of the Holy Grave, where each confession wanted to build their own museum around the memorial site. The genuine place is the one which sends a message, a message which can later be deepened,</i></p>	<p><i>poems, or of a clergyman holding masses is like a colossus who fears mice. Communism is a colossus with clay legs! This entire penitentiary system emphasizes how weak and fragile this politico-ideological construct of force is. Which does not mean there is not a strong force behind this regime. The regime fell in symbol and fact but is perpetual in mentality. And this is where its true force lies! Post-Communism is the real proof of force for Communism.'</i></p>	<p><i>claiming nothing or too little has been achieved ever since are right. But this is the good news after all: despite this toxic continuity of dictatorship into democratic process, Romania has made enormous steps! Not admitting this only legitimizes those who wanted to keep Romania imprisoned. [...] In school history books there is still a gross manipulation! The fact that students in Germany learn more about the Communist crimes than they do in Romania raises important questions. [...] At university level, even when they teach the history of Communism, a very soft version is presented. No crimes! We should be neither naïve nor paranoid. It is clear we are still witnessing a strong ideological battle which we believed to be finished or at least helpless against the evidence. [...] Those who kissed the regime's ass before 1989 cannot greet</i></p>
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		<i>diversified, decrypted in a complementary place which does not affect its originality.'</i>		<i>democracy with flowers. These are poisonous flowers! Most of our present-day important intellectuals have been praising the regime before 1989.'</i>
12. Mr Alin Mureșan	<i>'I always felt destroying families is the most horrible thing the Communists did. The case of Traian Popescu was terrible. He confessed to me that he was not content with not being able to have children because of the beatings he received in prison. He eventually died of testicular cancer. [...] I remember another former prisoner whose wife was six-months pregnant upon his arrest. He met his daughter in a prison visiting room when she was six years old. Many, many, many such stories! [...] Beyond all the beatings and tortures, I find this to be the truly important crime: they broke a society.'</i>	<i>'I had role models in front of me. I needed no one to tell me God exists. I saw God in front of me in these people! [...] I got close to Church and Christianity through my work on Pitești. Paradoxically, the stories of religion-based tortures in Pitești revealed to me that the Communists accepted the existence of God. They would not have attempted such great efforts against God had they not admitted His existence and importance. So, from an atheist I became I believer.'</i>	<i>'I spent my summer holidays in the library in Cluj reading everything I could find on life in the Communist prisons of Romania, to understand the context. [...] The main goal is to popularize the events which took place during the Communist times, and especially the repressive aspects. [...] we cannot keep on moving forward with no one found guilty for the thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of political prisoners. This is unacceptable! Someone is guilty for this, we must know them, and symbolically convict those found guilty on evidence.'</i>	<i>'We have to explain to people how much they are still affected by the Communist period, what calamities we inherited from the Communist times and how they can be fixed, why is Romania stolen as it is today. If you look at the top ten wealthiest Romanians today, you will most likely discover they are directly or indirectly linked to the Securitate. This is not a coincidence. Resources got into the hands of those who had access to them. The influence of Communism over our daily lives is much stronger than we may be willing to admit. [...] One reason is the direct or indirect followers of the Communists who are still ruling the country. And another one is that anyone who comes to power in</i>

				<p>Romania does it for getting rich, so the crimes of Communism are not on their agenda. While intellectuals in power were too few and had too little power. [...] Plus, the obstructions from other public institutions, which either are the continuers of pre-1989 institutions, or employ many people who were formed by and had mentors and relatives among the Communists. The research process is further slowed down by incompetence and laziness. [...] Some topics and historical figures disturb certain groups, who would prefer them completely cut out from history according to the present-day ideology.'</p>
13. Mr Gheorghe Mihai Bârlea	<p>'You cannot assume responsibility for the future if you choose to remain indifferent to the past. [...] A modern society aiming at being durable needs to have Truth at its basis. A society running away from its own truths will end up losing its</p>	<p>'He who does not know how to respect the dead, does not know how to respect the living either. [...] Most of the former convicts perceived their time in prison as a challenge God had bestowed upon them to test and strengthen their faith. [...]</p>	<p>'These events can also reveal how deeply affected peoples' mentality was by the Communist-style education. [...] The Communists confiscated the youth of many generations. I believe that no clear mind has the moral right to be indifferent to the</p>	<p>'These events can also reveal how deeply affected peoples' mentality was by the Communist-style education. One can only wonder how come people are not curious to find out the reality of their times in the aftermath of such a terrible historical period?!</p>

	<p>identity. It is a matter of morality, of identity. We have to ethically back up the political and social actions, as well as our personal lives. We need values which are inspired by both historical and present-day contexts. Without roots, without values our lives are based on chaotic and random experiences. We need human role models, we need dignified and significant actions to base our present-day actions on.'</p>	<p>When it comes to totalitarian regimes, prisons should be seen as altars. Any place where someone died for an idea, for the common Good, should be perceived as a sacred place.'</p>	<p>suffering of fellow humans who suffered in the prisons of any totalitarian regime in the name of their values. Any totalitarian regime is abominable to human history and it should be condemned accordingly!'</p>	<p>[...] As a professor, I am concerned with the unjustified reluctance in tackling Communism in all its perspectives. [...] The issue of school history books is absolutely embarrassing! Not even one Minister of Education assumed the moral responsibility of fixing up the curriculum. [...] We are yet to develop a convincing institutional and educational system. Historians usually have a certain reluctance when tackling topics of recent history. [...] Had the post-1989 regimes been more courageous in dealing with these abominable facts, most likely our subsequent development as a nation would have been clearer and healthier. We have delayed healing our society by not tackling our recent history. The judgement of history is not necessarily done in a tribunal, but in the collective memory and mentality. This way, it becomes a point of reference. When the moral</p>
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				<i>point of reference and the historical Truth are assumed in one's system of values it becomes more meaningful than a judicial decision.'</i>
14. Mr Marius Voinaghi	<i>'Each family has some taboo topics, which are not rummaged unless some triggers are employed. [...] I give them small assignments linked to their own families. I ask them when did their father or grandfather graduate and invite them to write something on the context of that particular year. The fact that they discuss in their families about the optional class and about the assignment I think it is the most important gain.'</i>	<i>'As a child I was taken to Church regularly, we also had classes of religion. It was a natural part of life back then. [...] I am planning to issue a biographical book of the high-school in 2019, but otherwise...may God help me!'</i>	<i>'Those who were responsible for atrocities before 1989 knew their best option is to allow memory to fade out through life's natural course: death. You know the saying: >>Communism has not died, it is just resting!<<. [...] When students ask me about my opinion on Vişinescu's conviction to prison, I tell them that, for all the atrocities he has committed, even a one-day conviction is needed only for him to hear the sound of the prison cell from the inside. He should hear that >>click<< made when locking the cell door.'</i>	<i>'A main flaw of the Romanian society is that we have the right person in the wrong place. It all starts in 8th grade when the young students are asked to choose a few options for continuing their education. Due to the allocation system for high-schools, students interested in bio-chemistry may end up doing something they are not interested in such as history. This reflects and extends to the entire society. Plus, people doing what others tell them to do. [...] The first words on the freed national television were: >>Mircea, pretend you are working!<<. So, many years later, we are still living in a staged play. We pretend to be working, they pretend to give laws for the people. [...] The history professors as a caste have lost their spirit of opposition.'</i>

				<p><i>We have entered a certain formalism which disables us from discussing as freely as we used to. [...] It is like we are cursed. Almost 30 years later we are in the same place. [...] Still the dissimulated speech, still the fear that you may suffer repercussions – things like people avoiding you, like losing your social life, like not being respected anymore...although what kind of respect is this in the first place? Before you knew that you may get some benefits if you sell your soul, if you do small favors for others. This mentality is still present. [...] We do not use the concept of >>you have to<< as the Communists did, it was replaced with >>it would be highly appreciated if...<< The boss was also informed before by superiors, who had themselves been informed by their superiors and so on. This is how centralism works. And if anything goes bad, each will</i></p>
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				<p>say they only did their job and they are not responsible for anything. Then you start calculating your options. You know the saying >>do not piss against the wind!<< [...]</p> <p>Today's children are much more receptive and open minded than we were at their age. But they get bored easily because of old-fashioned ways of teaching. [...]</p> <p>The world has opened up! The student may be better traveled and more informed than the professor. [...]</p> <p>A history professor nowadays has much more responsibility towards oneself and towards society than 10 years ago. [...]</p> <p>Plus, the history professor must constantly update one's knowledge on geopolitics, on sensitive cultural or religious matters, not just on remembering dates and events. [...]</p> <p>I still believe the present times are the best Romania has had in the last 200 years. If you can speak, speak out freely!'</p>
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<p>15. Mr Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor</p>	<p><i>'One of those close to Iuliu Maniu was a marine commander called Mocanu. I remember this because it happened when I was in my last days of high-school and I was preparing for passing the exam to enter the Faculty of History. [...] Another gentleman named Dan Alecu attended these meetings. He was a lawyer and very close to Corneliu Coposu and Diaconescu. Of course, this also affected me! The world in my grandfather's house was completely different than the world on the streets or in my school. [...] The >>I.C. Brătianu<< Institute has a project for the commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime, mostly of those who were members of the Liberal Party.'</i></p>		<p><i>'Some members of my family were persecuted. For example, my grandparents had a considerable wealth. They were not involved in politics. They were forcefully relocated, and their properties and possessions were confiscated by the Communists. Other members of my family were political detainees. My father was banned from pursuing university studies. For many years during my childhood, I could meet people who had experienced the Communist prisons in my grandfather's house. [...] For universities, this is the reality: the only academic institution which gathered the critical mass needed for teaching the history of the Communist regime is the Faculty of History in Bucharest. It is also true that the horrors of the Communist regime are not tackled. [...] I hope the new museum of Communist horrors will be developed! I remember talking to a lady</i></p>	<p><i>'There is a tendency among certain bureaucrats to force educators to limit their ability to reach wider audiences like students. This is happening as we speak with a new legislative initiative which will make us the only nation in Europe where the study field called >>history<< will no longer exist. [...] National identity is one thing, globalization is another thing. Globalization involves the co-existence in the same world of different national identities, and the free access and identitarian influences among these identities. The European identity is interesting because in many ways it does not disable the development of national identities. [...] I lived the 1989 Revolution with enthusiasm, just like any normal and rational Romanian. From many perspectives today's Romania is what I had hoped for. With all its flaws, the democratic system we have in</i></p>
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			<p>who had been in the second layer of the Communist nomenclature. I was telling her about the atrocities which happened during the Communist regime and she just could not believe my words.'</p>	<p>place is functional. Of course, many of us hoped we would obtain certain things much faster than we did in reality. For not having achieved more, the political class bares the greatest responsibility. Then, we also have the conservative and limited nature of our society. But, ultimately, it was the political class which took advantage of the limits of the civil society for their own interests and did not manage to maintain the societal progress.'</p>
16. Mrs Lucia Hossu-Longin	<p>'I was face to face with people who suffered for this nation and chose to be imprisoned rather than giving up their beliefs. [...] People who spend 10, 15, 17 years in prison, who lost their youth, some never started families after being released. [...] A member of the Romanian Parliament asked me: >>Why are you going to film a movie about Iuliu Maniu? His party are not in power!<<. Back then, it was</p>	<p>'So, I took upon myself the difficult mission of being a guide through Hell! [...] I love this persecuted world in the sense that the wrath of those years turned some people into saints! Each interview for the >>Memorial of Suffering<< was a blessing for me. [...] A process of mea culpa, of penitence is needed! [...] Contrition and shame are needed, they are Christian feelings!'</p>	<p>'My uncle was imprisoned in Aiud, but he refused to speak about this. Back then, those disclosing the suffering in prison risked being imprisoned again. [...] I was forced to join to Communist Party in 1967. I was never interested in politics, so I resigned from a Party newspaper called >>The Spark of Youth<<. I was called in front of a committee and told there is no way to resign the press of the Party.</p>	<p>'My generation was able to do free press from 1990. Before, I was producing theater and movies for the national TV station. [...] Present and future generations do not know the level of suffering this country has been through. School history books do not help them much, as they only contain brief information on the history after 1918.'</p>

	<i>also not allowed to mention the name of the King of Romania. [...]it is important for young people to know their roots, to know they are not successors of cowards, but of brave men.'</i>		<i>[...] One day I was informed a crew from Switzerland was visiting Romania and shooting a material about the political detention under the Communist regime. I was asked to join them for a week during which I had a chance to speak to former political prisoners. In that context I found out that a close family member of mine had also been politically detained. That is when I also found out the magnitude of the repression, how people had been tortured.'</i>	
17. Mrs Ioana Hașu	<i>'I think it was only around 1995 that I heard something really vague about one of my grandparents having opposed the Communist regime, but nothing too precise. [...] I cannot remember the exact number, but something around 16 close family members were arrested during those times. Some were executed, some were sentenced for life, but many died short after being released after years in</i>	<i>'I have been going to Church ever since I can remember. I have never had what we can call a >>conversion<< into Orthodoxy. My grandma always went to Church and took us with her. Every evening she prayed, and we could hear her. She never asked us to pray along, but through her influence we learned different prayers. She did it naturally, not to demonstrate something to someone. She did not need to</i>	<i>'We listened to Radio Free Europe in the back room of our house, with all the doors safely locked, and our parents always told us to not disclose this to anyone. My parents did not tell us much against the regime, although they both suffered because of it. [...] Revenge is nothing but toxic! Calling for such people to be treated the same way they treated the victims means just taking over the Communist speech and</i>	<i>'Especially in the first years after the Revolution, there were high stakes and those who had been in the system before were and are still in the system. [...] I believe they still influence us much stronger that we can possibly imagine on a societal and relational levels. I believe we have lost greatly during the Communist years. [...] We have lost the ability to relate to each other and smile. Foreign journalist came to</i>

	<p>prison. [...] In 1952, in a village in the Făgăraș County, one man was killed on the street and crucified on the building of the culture house. All kids and grownups from the surrounding villages were brought there to see him. The local representatives of the Communist Party gave him as an example of what it means to be a >>bandit<< and what may happen to those who choose this path. Let's try to imagine what it means for a community to witness this, what it means to them when some members of that community are arrested in the middle of the night, what it means to have a close member of your family taken away from you and to have absolutely no information about his or her fate. And imagine this happening in a community where everyone is very close to one another! This has happened for decades all over the country! [...] I read something that</p>	<p>speak about this, it was not theology but a natural part of life. Parents did this rarely. We had no icons displayed, but we had some prayer books and a Bible in the house. I never saw them go to Church, but they were not opposed to it either.'</p>	<p>methods. [...] I perceive today's society by discovering it through this identitarian framework. I see what we are lacking, I assume much of this we have lost during the Communist regime and I can identify the reasons and connections for such assumptions.'</p>	<p>Romania in the first years after the fall of Communism and they were shocked at seeing the people not smiling. Nowadays it is a bit better, but we still suffer from this disease. Yes, we have stopped naturally relating to others! Yes, we have stopped smiling! Yes, we are very inclined toward whining and toward emphasizing what the others are not doing well! There is a strong lack of trust in the others, a duplicity in the relationship with the others. This comes from tens of years of being scared to say what we truly believed. This has become ingrained in the way we relate to each other. Whole organizational and institutional structures were formed on this basis. [...] Studies show that the third generation – those who perceive the memory of trauma the strongest – is the generation of today's adults! Studies in neuroscience call this >>genetic memory<<. This is the memory of today's</p>
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	<i>Ana Blandiana said about this. It was linked to the victory of Communism being the creation of the New Human. I believe this is the New Human, the human broken apart from everything that his past was, his values, the world before this regime, a human without roots you can make whatever you want of. Young people can find themselves by knowing this side of history. They assume responsibility for what they are, they remove themselves from amnesia.'</i>			<i>active Romanian generation!'</i>
18. Mr Cristian Tudor-Popescu	<i>'My mother was a member of the Communist party. She completely believed in and adhered to Communism. My father no, right on the contrary. And this was one of the reasons for their separation. My father was never able to >>digest<< Communism. He also ended up being a Party member in the 1970s only to obtain a house. But he never truly adhered to the ideology.'</i>		<i>'I did not know – see, I am the perfect example of a young person raised during the Communist regime – about the amplitude of the oppression in the works camps, prisons. [...] I am a professor of propaganda and manipulation and I realized that I had always been a victim-child of the Communist manipulation! That is why I know it so well! Because I went through all the sieves and crookeries of</i>	<i>'Because this differentiation which has been done and is still done at European level of not placing Communism on the same level as Nazism should be erased! It is absolutely unfair! [...] The judicial system, the secret services, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, all of them are the successors of those structures. [...] If I look around, unfortunately Romania changed too little. Way too little compared to</i>

			<p>the Communist manipulation I have been objected to since childhood! [...] When they were telling me about the torture, for example the demented torture through silence in Râmnicu Sărat. That the guards had rubber soles and the prisoners could not utter any sound. Not ever when they died! Occasionally, someone like Ion Mihalache started screaming in the deathly silence of the prison. [...] Developing a Museum of the History of Communism with clear, detailed sections to gain perspective(s) of the >>network of terror<< in Romania is a must! Images of the hunger in the 1970s and 1980s, of the women who died during illegal abortions and so on can give a full image of what Communism was.'</p>	<p>1989! Someone asked me what I see as the many difference between today's Romania and 1989's Romania. What I said was: I see more cars and fewer humans! Unfortunately, I cannot say more than this. The aggression I felt pouring out of the TV before 1989 through the growling voice of Ceaușescu – I was listening to him with a sort of masochism, I was spitting on my own human condition every night listening to him preaching to me through the TV – I still feel today watching the Romanian TV channels. The same boorish aggression against the Being I can notice nowadays, just the means of delivery are different. Sometimes it makes me wonder: what was it for?! So, what did we replace that cretin and aggressive propaganda of the Communists with? With this propaganda delivered by the so-called news and entertainment channels! I</p>
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				<i>cannot even say which one is more noxious. I cannot tell you.'</i>
19. Ms Oana Stănciulescu	<i>'How can you move forward if you do not know who you are?! Just like an adopted orphan is spending the entire life looking for one's parents. We are a nation of orphans! I want to know my grandparents, with their good and bad deeds! How can you know who you are if someone suddenly tells you that all the history that matters starts in 1945?! We should be proud of the long heritage line of our people!'</i>	<i>'On the other hand, these political detainees accepted to be subjected to horrific treatments for 15-20 years for what they believed in: verticality, freedom, God, and democracy! [...] Whenever I go live on TV, and especially on such topics, I pray to those who died in the Communist prisons to help me have a good show because I can help their voice be heard. [...] It is the only one we have on this topic and I can only thank God it exists!'</i>	<i>'One female political prisoner I spoke to had been raped by the prison guards with bottles, metal rods and so on. Abominable and unthinkable things happened to these people. [...] The prison commanders did not suddenly decide one morning that they have to treat detainees the way they did. The Communist Party chose this line and I am yet to see a leader of the Party trialed and convicted for the political decisions taken before 1989. [...] If we realize that all the elite who built modern Romania during the World Wars was imprisoned by the Communists, we suddenly get a different identity and perspectives.'</i>	<i>'What I refer to is the freedom of speech, our freedom of expression which we have been giving away piece by piece for the last few years. We should fight when we see someone trying to take away a bit of our freedom. Nothing is irreversible. When entering capitalism, we thought it is irreversible. I do not believe this anymore. [...] Many of those who have ruled Romania after 1989 are former cadres or the heirs of the Communist regime before 1989, so they have no interest for such things to be known. Others are just dumb and cynical and only care for their own pockets.'</i>
20. Mr Dan Puric	<i>'I remember the uprising of Horia, Cloșca and Crișan. Upon the defeat of the uprising, Horia and Cloșca sought refuge in the</i>	<i>'This extraordinary faith has saved us. And it is a very natural faith, not one leading to conflicts. [...] I have to repeat, this intellectuality is</i>	<i>'I was born already a prisoner. The society was already schizoid because the Communist-style Socialism focused on a nationalist</i>	<i>'We are still ruled by former members of the Securitate who profited from the Revolution and seem to be ever-so-confident that no one</i>

<p>mountains. In the nearby village, the Austrian authorities promised 300 golden coins for anyone who helped them capture Horia and Cloșca. The amount is interesting, as it resembles the 300 silver coins received by Judas to betray Christ. Seven peasants from the village betrayed them and they were finally captured. Upon their execution, Horia said he forgives the seven villagers from the bottom of his heart. Cloșca asked for all his possessions to be given to the Church so that his name is mentioned in prayers. Their last sigh remained Christian! [...] Meeting them is like physically touching profound Romania. It materializes something which seemed abstract. Just like Aristotle says: >>matter is made of palpable things, but also of temporal things like history<<. Meeting former prisoners enabled me to touch history. I touched the</p>	<p>bought by an international occult pretending to be international and Christian but in fact being malignant. [...] They do not have the straight spine and verticality of the Christian dignity, they mime it. They write books on Church, but their purpose is to sell anything. [...] They truly believed everything comes from God, and each of them carried his own Cross.' [...] 'The only solution is faith which gives people strength. A Romanian peasant once told me: >>I do not just believe, I also have confidence in God!<<. We crush walls as we did for 2,000 years and let God do His job. If we take one step, He takes ten. [...] All that was anti-Bolshevik in this country becomes sacred with the passage of time.'</p>	<p>idolatry and exaltation had already been imposed. [...] My mum later told me that for many years my dad always had poison in his pocket with the purpose of killing himself had the Communists decided to arrest him. A fantastic terror! [...] Gheorghe Jijie – may God rest his soul – was telling me about his tortures in the Aiud prison. His cell mate – a Greek Catholic priest – was brought in with broken ribs and a crushed jaw after terrible beatings. [...] Criminal history is done by degenerates reaching power, while valuable people endure the degenerates' actions.'</p>	<p>can shake them of their ruling seats. They have a terrible nerve! They do this with the financing and support from Occidental nations. The Occident crushed us again! Had they wanted to, they could completely cut the connection between present-day Romania and former authorities rather than encourage the Romanian youth to seek a better life and lose their identity abroad. [...] Romania is still a large penitentiary carefully managed by officers nowadays dressed up as civilians. Before they were members of the militia and Securitate, nowadays they are civilians. [...] Political prisoners have derisory pensions while former torturers have hundreds or thousands of euro per months. They do not discuss this in Brussels, they are shy. [...] It took me two days to realize it is a coup d'état and two weeks to realize we had been sold once more to the</p>
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	<p>eternity, the dignity, the memory of our people, the Romanian way of being. They were telling me how members of rival political parties on the outside came together in prison. Same for religious denominations. A wisdom, a gentleness, a nature of a superior civilization. Our people have a superior civilization of the soul. In a civilization of material products, we may still be rather barbarian. In terms of the soul, our people have an unmatched touch. [...] The Romanian people do not have a vocation for hatred. Prince Charming is born in our fairy tales for love, for an ontological reparation of the Being. [...] I decided to speak to young people about the victims of the Communist regime because they were unplugged from their past, faith, traditions, or role models so that they become easier to manipulate. Someone living in a perpetual present has no</p>			<p>West. So, I had to learn to clear my mind because this was going to be a lengthy process. What followed was a caricature of democracy where the gutter of society became ministers. We exited the zoo and entered the free-shooting jungle. [...] Many of our historians are hired to confuse young minds. If the crimes are taught in schools, some people by default become responsible. This is not wanted! The heirs of those responsible are still in power!'</p>
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	<i>future. Inviting them to the depth of Romania gives them an identity, a thrill of being!’</i>			
21. Mr Tudor Gheorghe	<i>‘The arrest of my dear father produced a rupture inside me just as I was crossing from childhood into teenage. [...] I had to lie that my mother – advised by a lawyer – divorced my dad. In the enrolment documents I had to write about my dad, so I said I had no clue about him and that he left us after divorcing my mum. [...] Most of those imprisoned were priests, intellectuals. That is where and when the societal rupture happened.’</i>	<i>‘There were also such people under Communism. Few, but God placed them in the right places for helping me. [...] Maybe God wanted me to pass through these thresholds to become what I am today. [...] ‘>>With Christ in the Cell<< is realized as a personal recognition of the personal suffering of my dad and all of those who were imprisoned. What helped many prisoners resist was their belief in God. [...] They must be forgiven, but we do not seem to employ Christian values towards them.’</i>	<i>‘They completely banned my concert based on Caragiale’s work. Later, in 1986, they forbid me to perform again. [...] Then I had a project called >>Songs through a closed mouth<<, in which I included songs I could not perform during the Communist times.’</i>	<i>‘Today we have no more Communists in Romania, we have Communist leftovers. Reminiscences are found without a doubt! [...] Many good things have been done after 1989. In terms of possessions, we are rather good. What upsets me is the very low level of morality. The morality of this nation has been destroyed! The corruption and lack of infrastructure...the hell with them, we will improve this! But what do we do with the new generations of youngsters who do not have educational models? [...] We should not be arrogant about our nationality. Who are we?! We are nothing! A nation unable to decide their own fate and receiving indications from foreigners! [...] We have no civic society. There are the petty interests of certain individuals calling themselves a civic society.</i>

				<p><i>[...] All the important things in this country must be private initiatives! Unfortunately, when one has a very good idea, others set obstacles against its development. This is how the world is built. Around a person of a high intellectual capability and strength you will find at least ten individuals of mediocre intellect. The one of high intellect fights and struggles alone, the mediocre ones shake hands and cooperate.'</i></p>
22. Mr Vasile Iusco	<p><i>'In October, my grandfather was arrested among 167 others and sentenced to 16 years in prison. He was imprisoned in the Gherla Prison and passed away on 4 January 1951, most likely because of hunger and cold. We do not know the details because his death certificate only states >>deceased on 4 January 1951<<. The most painful aspect for my grandmother was not being able to get his body. All we know is that those who died in</i></p>	<p><i>'After the 1989 Revolution, the Greek-Catholic Church became legal again. The Theological Institute in Baia Mare was set up. I graduated from this institute in 1994. After graduation I got married and became a priest. I was bound to activate in the parishes which had been closed down by the Communists. This meant I had to seek a flock, I was like a shepherd without a flock. I re-established a parish in Botiza. I stayed there for a</i></p>	<p><i>'After the 1946-elections forged by the Communists, the Russian-style democracy was established. Among the first political prisoners were many students or intellectuals. A virulent campaign against the Catholic Church began. The legislative measures set in place disabled the activity of the Catholic Church. [...] A wave of arresting bishops and priests followed. [...] Communism was and still is globally a form of</i></p>	<p><i>'The Romanian society is confused and unable to find its purpose. The youth are leaving the country. The political scene is disastrous, we have no politicians but opportunists. They keep changing political parties only hoping to add another digit to their bank accounts. [...] Being sinful is one thing, being corrupt is a completely different thing. To be sinful implies one is acknowledging his wrongdoings and working to improve his condition,</i></p>

	<p><i>those days were buried in three separate mass graves and flattened by bulldozer. My grandmother was left alone with six kids. [...] We are an old people, with a certain culture and civilization.'</i></p>	<p><i>little time, as I was soon sent to look after the Romanian Christians in Ukraine [...] My choice is based on the role model that the respective priest ended up being. He had such a tremendous inner force when talking about the suffering of Christ on the Cross. [...] Starting in 2002, the Greek-Catholic Church felt the need to commemorate these martyrs by organizing a pilgrimage. [...] The earthly justice precedes the divine justice. When one is convicted for the atrocities one has committed, one should also prepare for the divine justice.'</i></p>	<p><i>oppression. [...] This event is meant to remind people that Romania had suffered enormously during the Communist regime.'</i></p>	<p><i>being corrupt implies persevering in wrongdoings. [...] Sometimes I think they forget they are mortals like the rest of us. [...] The youth are in great need of role models. They have almost none in recent history, and even the historical ones have recently been denigrated. What values can they report to?! [...] The one who is responsible for the moral decline of the Romanian society is comrade Ion Iliescu. After he called the miners to beat up the student protesters in June 1990 he had the nerve to declare that the miners showed civic and moral conduct. [...] We need a little verticality to not blindly accept laws and values imposed to us by foreign factors. We are not planets to align ourselves. We must understand our place in this Europe. The purpose of political correctness is the drainage of consciousness and personality.'</i></p>
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<p>23. Mr Vasile Pop</p>	<p><i>'Remembering our forefathers can shape present-day generations. [...] The Sighet Museum is a place for remembering those who chose to suffer for their beliefs and their values.'</i></p>	<p><i>'I have been the Orthodox archpriest in Sighet since 2000. I was born in 1957 and educated in Satu Mare. Later, I joined the Theological Institute in Sibiu. [...] In this part of the country most of the priests arrested belonged to the Greek-Catholic Church. [...] We know of four great Orthodox theologians who were imprisoned in the Sighet Prison. [...] Almost all of those who survived the atrocities without giving up their values linked their resistance to their belief in God. [...] Although the Bible calls for divine justice, I believe a worldly justice is definitely needed. [...] Even Saint Paul said >>Remember your great people. Pay attention to how they accomplished their faith and follow the lessons of their life<<. [...] The victims are in our memories and prayers. We accepted all the Memorial authorities' invitations for</i></p>	<p><i>'They argue they only did their job, but they did a lot of excesses. These were uneducated people who got easily brainwashed. The whole Communism is a lie that not even those who brainwash others believe in. The ideology is a lie, while the dead it produced are the real thing.'</i></p>	<p><i>'[...] there is more freedom of expression and freedom of behaviour, but some of these freedoms were poorly interpreted and adopted'</i></p>
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		<i>commemorative masses or other similar events. [...] The church seems to be well-represented.'</i>		
24. The Visitor	<p><i>'Eternal gratitude to the martyrs of our nation. Through their sacrifice we will find ourselves again as a people.'</i></p> <p><i>'Sighet will help Romanians rediscover our history and our Romanian soul.'</i></p> <p><i>'Too many broken destinies. With them, the natural destiny of our nation was also broken. May our people find their real and natural destiny again.'</i></p>	<p><i>'God, take these peoples' souls to the Heavens because Sighet was their Hell!'</i></p> <p><i>'May God forgive the souls of those who died in this prison.'</i></p> <p><i>'May God forgive their souls! Horrible, terrifying, but true. Overwhelmed with sadness!'</i></p> <p><i>'May God forgive them, and may our sighs and regrets comfort them beyond death.'</i></p> <p><i>'May God rest in His kingdom all those who suffered in this place of terror.'</i></p> <p><i>'May their souls rest in peace!'</i></p> <p><i>'May God punish those who committed these unimaginable actions, and may He rest the souls of those who sacrificed themselves for this nation.'</i></p> <p><i>'God will make justice!'</i></p> <p><i>'With pain and pride, we thank God for the light this establishment brings in our</i></p>	<p><i>'May this be a lesson about one of the darkest pages in the history of humanity: Communism!'</i></p> <p><i>'Communism was more criminal than fascism.'</i></p> <p><i>'Communism is a dirty stain on the history of Europe.'</i></p> <p><i>'Communism is a stain on the history of the world.'</i></p> <p><i>'After visiting the Memorial, I hate the Communists even more!'</i></p> <p><i>'I have a feeling of nervousness and hatred for those who beat, killed and destroyed all that was beautiful.'</i></p> <p><i>'After visiting this museum, one cannot stop feeling revolt and eternal hatred of Communism. Never forget and never forgive!'</i></p> <p><i>'Never forgive the Communists. They should be shown the evil they brought upon this country.'</i></p>	<p><i>'May God rest the souls of those who sacrificed here decades ago so we can have a better life today.'</i></p> <p><i>'Thank you for fighting so we can be free today!'</i></p> <p><i>'Thank you for making us realize how free we are and thanks to whom!'</i></p> <p><i>'Thousands of thanks to those who suffered for our freedom!!!'</i></p> <p><i>'Your suffering enabled the whole nation to live in freedom and peace. Thank you!'</i></p> <p><i>'I came to pay my respects to our martyrs. Thanks to them we have our freedom and belief in God.'</i></p> <p><i>'There is no greater punishment than being deprived of freedom.'</i></p> <p><i>'Respect to those who suffered here. I am pregnant, and I am happy to be able to raise my child in a free country. Human rights</i></p>

		<p><i>lives by acknowledging this past for the future of a respectable nation. We will try to follow the path you have shown us here.'</i></p>	<p><i>'I WILL NOT FORGIVE UNTIL I DIE those who committed these unimaginable crimes.'</i></p> <p><i>'I knew it was terrible, but now I felt the atmosphere charged with the moans of the prisoners.'</i></p> <p><i>'In each corner of this prison screams of pain can be heard.'</i></p> <p><i>'You can still smell the suffering.'</i></p> <p><i>'We leave this place with a heavier soul than the air the prisoners were breathing here!!!'</i></p> <p><i>'Tragic, shocking, sinister, grim. It is like reliving their experience. It is like stepping on bones.'</i></p> <p><i>'There is nothing sadder than being chained by your brothers in your own country.'</i></p> <p><i>'I could never imagine a human can inflict such suffering through torture to other humans.'</i></p> <p><i>'So much pain and suffering linger in this space. You must ask yourself: how could</i></p>	<p><i>should not be trampled under any circumstance.'</i></p> <p><i>'Visiting this political prison and horrors one shudders and asks himself how some people can today support the heirs of the Communists.'</i></p> <p><i>'People, pay attention! Communism still lingers in Romania camouflaged in the colors of the Social Democrat Party. Wake up before it is too late!'</i></p> <p><i>'It is painful to see the extermination of the elites. Let's not forget those who committed the atrocities are still in power.'</i></p> <p><i>'Terrifying and paradoxical: the heirs of the Communists and still ruling and robbing this nation.'</i></p> <p><i>'When will our people get rid of the slaves with Bolshevik mentalities? How long will we still endure this crypto-communist democracy? I believe all Romanians have tasted the benefits of our good friend from the East.'</i></p> <p><i>'Too bad these martyrs fought for causes which,</i></p>
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			<p><i>Romanians do this to their fellow Romanians?’</i></p> <p><i>‘My whole childhood was scarred by fear!’</i></p> <p><i>‘Visiting this museum, I remember the image of my father who spent four years and six months in the harsh and tragic torments of this prison.’</i></p> <p><i>‘I am trying to relive my father’s experiences while imprisoned here in ’48-’49. It is touching for a daughter to visit her father’s places of torment.’</i></p> <p><i>‘On the walls of this museum I found the portrait of my father who was sentenced to life imprisonment. He is forever in our hearts!’</i></p> <p><i>‘I am deeply impressed. I remembered my father and grandfather who were imprisoned because they dared to believe in their dream.’</i></p> <p><i>‘My father, my whole family experienced these sufferings. Communism and its supporters are the only thing I will hate until I die!’</i></p>	<p><i>unfortunately, no present-day politician can lead to completion.’</i></p> <p><i>‘People, people, people! Wake up! What have these people died for? So you can have villas, cars, and children with diplomas gained over night? So that illiterate people can rule this nation? Shame!’</i></p> <p><i>‘We believe it is absolutely necessary to invent a similar prison for today’s politicians who robbed Romania with their deeds and greed.’</i></p>
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			<p><i>'I found the photo of my grandfather who died in the Canal labour camp on the walls of the Sighet Memorial.'</i></p> <p><i>'In the memory of my grandfather who was imprisoned between these walls. The villains forgot one thing: the soul and faith cannot be chained or locked behind bars.'</i></p>	
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5.1.5 Identity Construction of ‘*Les (Mi)lieux de Mémoire Sombre*’: An Empirical Model of Narrative Integration

Having discussed the three orders of narrative integration based on the dyadic semiotic-phenomenological analysis and against relevant theories and concepts, the present research attempts to bring these orders together into a holistic model to explain the process(es) of identity construction of ‘*les milieux de mémoire sombre*’ (Figure 9).

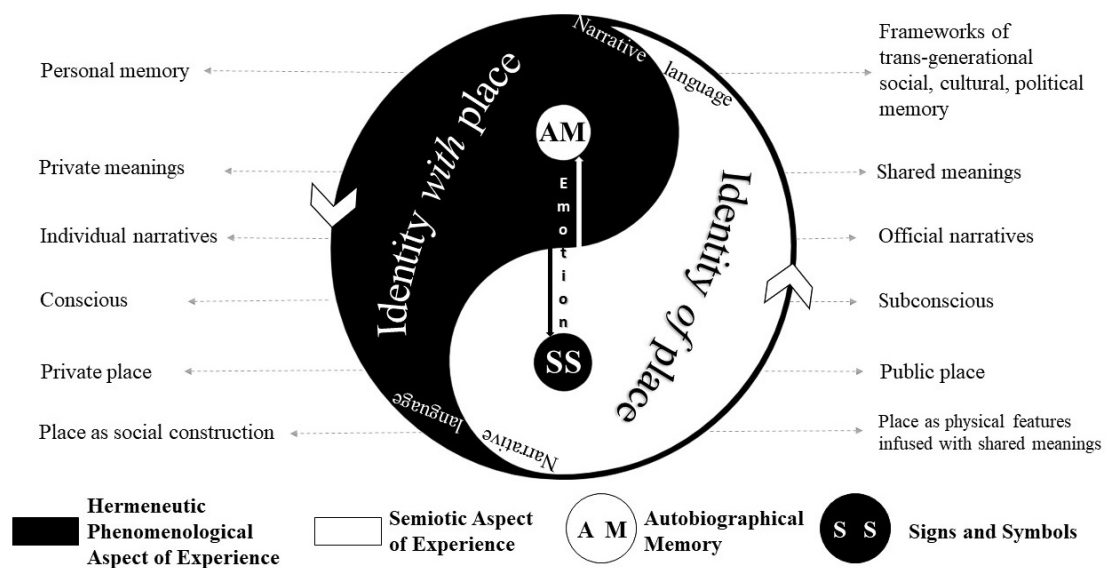


Figure 9 : Identity Construction of *Les Milieux de Mémoire Sombre*

As previously detailed, many dark tourism research endeavors have analyzed the connection between memory, narrative, place identity, or place construction and the phenomenon of traveling to sites of death and suffering. Also, considerable amounts of studies have focused on either semiotic or phenomenological experiential aspects. Nevertheless, the current study proposes that meaningful experiences with dark heritage sites are a cumulative function of memory, narrative, place identity, and place

construction. To achieve a holistic image of the intimate connection among these elements, the present research argues that experience should be understood as a dyadic construction comprised of a hermeneutic phenomenological aspect rooted in autobiographical memory, and a Peircean semiotic aspect rooted in collectively-shared signs and symbols.

As the above table clearly shows, all participants touch upon at least two of the four pillars of Romanianness conceptualized in this study. More precisely, the encounter with the broader theme of Communist repression triggers autobiographical memories which the participants articulate in what they perceive to be meaningful and coherent narratives as they make sense of the investigated topic and site. In many cases, these autobiographical memories involve elements of Romanian Common Knowledge which are also omnipresent throughout the master narrative and cultural materiality of the Sighet Memorial Museum. The interaction between one's autobiographical memories and signs and symbols infused with Romanian Common Knowledge triggers diverse conscious or subconscious emotional reactions within the participants which they express in different means and tones. In turn, this emotional loading imbues the experience with meaning by suturing the individual into the shared national framework of meaning-making which transcends spatiality and temporality. This attribution of meaning transforms the space into a place, more precisely into a private or public place depending on whether meanings are personal and individual or collective and shared. In this way, place identity is constructed as a dyadic structure comprised of identity *with* place and identity *of* place. These two aspects, although distinct to one another, coexist and reinforce each other in a fluid and ever-changing identitarian flux. Fundamentally, the identitarian glue keeping

these elements together into a meaningful bricolage by enabling the formulation and expression of narratives and emotions is the narrative language – the Romanian language in the current study – in its role as a safe keeper of transgenerational shared values, symbols, and memories.

5.2 Conceptualizing ‘*Les Milieux de Mémoire Sombre*’

As the research has shown by now, places such as the Sighet Memorial Museum are imbued in memory. In each encounter – either physical, mental, or emotional – with such sites, individuals retrieve memories, express memories, encounter memories, accept/negotiate/reject memories, behave according to memories, and gain new memories. Memory is omnipresent in all processes of attributing meanings to sites of death and suffering. Even if they are not memories of personally-lived events of death and suffering, people retrieve and express autobiographical memories which they consider to be meaningful in a particular meaning-making process. Moreover, much of what people remember they did not experience directly, but ‘being social presupposes the ability to experience events that happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them as if they were part of our own past’ (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 290). Giving the example of the Holocaust, Kansteiner (2002) critically suggests that it is actually when memories transcend the place and time of the event’s occurrence and are separated of individual memory that they are at their most collective and powerful. Such sociobiographical memory also results in the sense of pride, pain, or shame individuals occasionally experience about events that had occurred in communities they belong to

long before they joined them (Zerubavel, 1996). Building on this, Landsberg (2004) coined the term ‘prosthetic memory’ to define personal, deeply felt memories of traumatic past that the individual has not personally lived through, but so strongly identifies with that, they become part of his/her own memory. In the context of the Holocaust, Hirsch (1999) employs the term ‘postmemory’ to propose that, although children of survivors of collective drama only ‘remember’ the experience of their parents as stories and images they grew up with, they are so powerful they become memories in themselves. One such collective trauma is represented by the totalitarian Communist regime ruling Romania between 1945-1989. Evans-Campbell (2008) shows how the effects of collective trauma are transmitted across generations and, in so doing, affect not only the survivors, but also their descendants on individual, familial, and societal levels. Most studies investigating this phenomenon have focused on psychodynamic processes of social learning through memory intergenerational transmission within familial contexts (Bezo & Maggi, 2015). Such studies include Sorscher & Cohen (1997), Rowland-Klein & Dunlop (1998), Weiss & Weiss (2000), Kellermann (2001), Lev-Wiesel (2007), and Fossion *et al.* (2015). Others have chosen to focus on the interaction between biological and social forces by engaging in the emerging field of epigenetics. According to Bezo & Maggi (2015, p. 88), ‘epigenetics postulates that social experiences, including familial ones, result in epigenetic changes that affect an individual's genetic expression, in-utero, during early development, and throughout the life course.’ Champagne (2010, p. 570) proposes that transmissible epigenetic changes ‘may serve as a cellular memory’ of human experiences which influences the neurodevelopment, behaviors, and well-being of future generations. In a groundbreaking – albeit controversial – genetic study, Yehuda *et al.* (2016) proved

that gene changes caused by the trauma experienced by Holocaust survivors can be transmitted to their children via epigenetic inheritance. No matter of the research perspective, these studies – mirrored in the findings of the present research – resonate with Bezo & Maggi (2015, p. 93) conclusion that ‘the communication of knowledge and oral accounts between generations, whether verifiable by independent sources as fact or lore, constitute memories in their own right that operate in the present and impact descendants.’

Such developments in memory studies are in line with Paul Ricoeur’s criticism of Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de Mémoire* project, as described by Hutton (2016). As a reminder, Pierre Nora (1989, p. 7), had announced the proliferation of *lieux de mémoire* – places of memory, because they were no longer *milieux de mémoire* – real environments of memory. Ricoeur (cited in Hutton, 2016) argues that Nora structured his *lieux* thesis of history’s domination over memory by neglecting the traumatic events of the 20th century such as the Holocaust. ‘Was Nora not minimizing the significance of repressed memory, dormant but alive, by limiting his discussion to residues of memory that no longer animated contemporary conceptions of the past?’ Paul Ricoeur wonders (cited in Hutton, 2016, p. 42). In fact, Ricoeur argues, Nora may have reached a different conclusion – understanding memory’s autonomy in regard to history – had he considered that trauma does not respond to historians’ interrogation in the transparent way he proposed, and that repressed memories and meanings of trauma remain ever-so-present in the psyches of its victims and continue to haunt contemporaneous consciousness (cited in Hutton, 2016). This idea mirrors Samuel’s (1994) criticism of Nora’s work for prioritizing official memory over popular memory. The findings in the current study are in line with and such

criticism of Nora's *lieux de mémoire*. They expose the entire experience with places of or associated with death and suffering to be an interplay of ever-so-present and relevant memories which, in turn, infuse the experience and the place with meaning. This postulates that such places contradict Nora's *lieux de mémoire* thesis. Rather, it is argued that places of death and suffering are a particular type of *milieux de mémoire*.

Based on all the theoretical and empirical factors discussed in the current paper, *les milieux de mémoire sombre* are translated as *places of somber memories*, and defined as *identitarian co-constructions where personal and collective memory, private and shared meanings, and individual and official narratives associated with sensitive, painful, and disruptive historical events linger, coexist, and reinforce each other in a fluid and emotion-infused identitarian flux which bridges between the conscious and subconscious, the living and the dead, and the physical and the metaphysical to transcend temporality and spatiality*.

6. LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION

This chapter proactively and constructively acknowledges a series of limitations, details a variety of implications, and brings the thesis to an end with concluding remarks and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Limitations

One of the main limitations of the study is the ‘difficulty even inaccessibility of Peirce’s work’ (Freadman, 2004, p. 275). Following a 57-year highly prolific career, his published works run to approximately 12,000 printed pages, and his known unpublished manuscripts run to about 80,000 handwritten pages. His fields of research range from logic, linguistics, semiotics, and psychology to mathematics, physics, chemistry, and economy, making his philosophy incredibly dense. Peirce’s ideas evolved over his intellectual life, and he revisited topics over time, sometimes with contradicting results. For example, his early work depicts an interpretivist approach, while his later work transforms him into the architect of pragmatism. Also, Peirce embraced nominalism in his early career only to become a realist later on (CP 4.1). The analysis becomes even more complicated when considering Burch’s (2014) argument that Peirce’s fallibilist and infinitely evolutionary reality turn him into an idealist of the Hegelian sort. His choice of semantics over time is also confusing in trying to decipher his writing. For example, sometimes he uses the word ‘sign’ to refer to the whole triadic system (object-representamen-interpretant), while on different occasions ‘sign’ is used as a synonym for

the representamen. Thus, reading his writing in a non-chronological way can lead to the false impression that he cannot complete a train of thought. Metro-Roland (2011a) quotes James Jakób Liszka's (1996) description of Peirce's writing: 'Let's be frank. Peirce's writing is terse and convoluted, without much wit or grace [...] at times his analyses are so complex and detailed that they seem to make the phenomenon disappear. His examples are obscure and exotic, and so they confuse rather than help. He has a tendency toward digression'. Additionally, Peirce did not study the social use of signs, but perceived semiotics as a dialogic process central to his thinking. The lack of a unified code of understanding for Peircean philosophy in general and semiotic thinking in particular makes their usage harder when studying specific meaning-making practices. 'This helps to explain the absence of Peircean semiotic theory from most tourism work which undertakes sign theory' (Metro-Roland, 2011a, p. 12).

Similarly, Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* is a monumental historical work which includes 'seven volumes edited by Nora between 1984 and 1992, comprising essays from nearly 120 prominent French scholars. These analyses dissected French memories of the Republic, the nation, and France itself' (Legg, 2005, p. 481). Out of these, only selected sections have ever been translated into English. The introductory study published in *Representations* in 1989 has had the strongest effect on the English-speaking world (Legg, 2005). This was sufficient for the purpose of the current study since it explained Nora's understanding of *lieux de mémoire* in depth.

Another limitation can be the fact that studies employing interpretivist approaches involve a certain degree of subjectivity. Indeed, qualitative methods allow for certain

analytical freedom and creativity regarding procedures, but, as long as they behave according to the proposed ontology and epistemology, they cannot be labeled as inappropriate. It has even been argued that all research is subjective, as by choosing a paradigm one is subjectively oriented towards a certain way of doing research (Mack, 2010). The usage of Peircean semiotics is perceived to reduce the level of subjectivity. Contrary to the Saussurean arbitrary meaning-making, the Peircean semiotics involve logic and reach meaning by linking individuals to specific frameworks of thought and behavior. Also, the adopted phenomenological method (IPA) is a well-established tool in medical psychology with clear philosophical, theoretical, practical, and ethical underpinnings. The study also includes detailed sections of techniques employed for assessing the validity of the findings and reducing the possibility of imposing researcher's biases.

Some may argue that not all the questions and answers were directly focused on the Sighet Memorial Museum. Indeed, some parts of the interviews were about the broader topic of Communist totalitarian repression. Considering that the Sighet Prison is one of the most critical places of political detention under the Communist regime, and, as a museal institution, remains the only one in Romania dedicated to this historical period, it was assumed that whatever the participants have to say about the broader topic of Communist totalitarianism can be extrapolated to the Sighet Memorial Museum. Also, IPA strongly encourages the contextualization of the study participants' interpretation through innovative means. To achieve this, the researcher allowed for the interviews to transform – in most cases – in open discussions. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed about the topic of investigation. After this, they were allowed

to speak freely under the presumption that they would express what they perceive to be relevant in ways they perceive to be meaningful and coherent. This enabled the researcher to obtain rich data which supported the subsequent interpretation.

6.2 Implications

The current section details the implications of the study from five perspectives. First, the gaps mentioned in the Problem Statement are tackled. Second, the implications of the new concept *les milieux de mémoire sombre* toward replacing the overtones of the term ‘dark’ from the phenomenon of traveling to sites associated with death and suffering are discussed. Third, the implications of the study for the dark tourism theory are depicted. Fourth, the ever-so-important issue of generalizing findings in qualitative studies is addressed. Lastly, several implications for non-academics are proposed.

6.2.1 Mind the Gaps

The present research hears scholars’ calls for innovative interdisciplinary qualitative mixed-method approaches which place analytical, introspective, reflective, transformational, and spiritual interpretation at their core, and which manage to overcome the habitual dualities of supply-demand, push-pull, individual-collective, and material-immaterial. In the same line, researchers have also drawn attention to the scarcity of studies which place interpretative processes in the social, cultural, and political context in which they take place. Moreover, dark tourism scholars’ reluctance to engage with interdisciplinary theories of memory, narrative, identity, and death – especially recent

developments in mainstream psychology – has also come into the spotlight. To address these gaps, a bricolage integrative framework comprised of a phenomenological and a semiotic component is employed in the current study. Adopted from medical psychology, IPA is a well-established tool whose area of interest brings together precisely these aspects: it investigates how individuals (re)create their identities by making sense of their own memories of loss and suffering. Memory, narrative, and identity are also fundamental pillars of Peircean semiotics. This dyadic framework unfolds under the interpretivist umbrella and gains in-depth meanings through the analytical potential of the hermeneutic circle. The entire interpretive process of the study happens within the framework of transgenerational cultural, social, and political memory conceptualized as Romanianness. Such an approach manages to expose the complexity, depth, subtlety, and fluidity of the experience with sites of death and suffering. A strong argument for the use of interdisciplinary qualitative approaches is that the *les milieux de mémoire sombre* could not have been conceptualized had only one of the two methodological aspects been tackled. Nora (1989, p.12) proposes that *lieux de mémoire* ‘originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally’. Thus, a semiotic reading of the Sighet Memorial Museum could have rightfully enabled one to conclude the site has become one of the *lieux de mémoire*, or, in Legg’s (2005, p. 496) words, ‘those *cenotaphs* (literally ‘empty graves’) of memory which, rather than acting as the final refuge of memory, mark those places and ways in which history has appropriated the space and function of memory.’ Bringing together Peircean semiotics and IPA exposes the Sighet Memorial Museum as

soaked in living organic memory which supports and encourages the conclusion that the site is, in fact, a special type of *milieux de mémoire*.

The present research also builds on the emphasized reluctance of dark tourism academia to give voice to the visitors and to previously ignored stakeholders, such as the people whose stories are represented at the site of death and suffering and the professionals responsible for managing such sites. The current study addressed this gap by adopting an approach – IPA – whose declared purpose is to give voice to participants. Also, voice was given to a variety of relevant stakeholders of different socio-cultural and political backgrounds, including high-level authorities and politicians, museum authorities, educators, artists, journalists, visitors, and a former political prisoner and the former commander at the Sighet Penitentiary. This approach exposed rich and subtle details about the politics of museography at sites of death and suffering, thus meeting another research gap.

Another significant gap the present paper builds on is the lack of clear and thorough explanations of philosophical and/or methodological underpinnings in many of the previous endeavors which have attempted innovative phenomenological or semiotic approaches to investigating experiential aspects of the tourist experience. Attempts were made to provide in-depth explanations of philosophical considerations behind the chosen approaches, and – especially – paradigmatic and ethical aspects which allow for the hermeneutic-phenomenological and Peircean semiotic methods to be combined and integrated. Had such transparent and detailed accounts been omitted or ignored, the study would have been exposed to criticism and doubt regarding the validity of its findings.

The current study also comes to fill the contextual gap represented by the severe lack of dark tourism investigations of Communism-based sites compared to the Holocaust, war, and slavery sites. In so doing, it exposes that experiences with sites of death and suffering are imbued with consonant and dissonant emotions and meanings and perceptions stemming from individual and collective memories which are ever-so-present, relevant, and influential in contemporaneous mentalities.

All in all, most of the previous literature has individually analyzed the topics of memory, narrative, place identity, place construction, visitor experience, and dark tourism/heritage. Embracing the interpretivist paradigm, the present research is important because it analyses the relationship between these topics, bringing them together under a thorough model of understanding while addressing all the above gaps.

6.2.2 Removing the ‘Dark’ from Dark Tourism

As the study has discussed, the use of the word ‘dark’ has proven controversial. In his review of dark tourism literature, Light (2017, p. 294) synthesizes the diversity of challenging arguments: ‘Some object to its pejorative overtones and assumption that visiting places of death and suffering is somehow morbid behavior. Others dislike the essentialist overtones of >>dark<<, arguing that darkness is socially constructed and therefore means different things to different people. The term has also been criticised for conflating extremely diverse places, sites and visitor experiences that have little in common. Moreover, the very concept of dark tourism reflects a way of thinking about tourism (and death) that is specific to English-speaking countries since neither the term

nor the concept translates easily into other languages'. The current paper agrees with scholars who have argued that such controversies have diluted the meaning of the concept and the scope of the academic investigation.

Taking these factors into consideration, a new term is conceptualized – *les milieux de mémoire sombre* – by meaningfully and critically transposing Pierre Nora's *les milieux de mémoire* into the experiential realm of dark tourism. To bypass the above interpretive traps and shortcomings of using the term 'dark', the proposed English translation is *places of somber memories*. Cambridge Dictionary figuratively translates the French 'sombre' as somber, dark, gloomy, dusky, or shadowy. Except for 'somber', the other terms are perceived to have similar connotations and implications with 'dark'. Instead, 'somber' suggests meanings of sadness, seriousness, solemnity, or melancholy, and – according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary – is often used in contexts of dealing with loss and attending memorial and commemorative events. This word is perceived as more appropriate than 'dark' in its potential to overcome the challenging arguments usually used against the term 'dark'. Firstly, 'somber' does not hold the judgemental assumption that someone who engages with a site of death and suffering does necessarily have morbid motivations. Nor does it discourage visitation by implying the site is intrinsically negative or disturbing. Secondly, due to not having the harsh and essentialist overtones of 'dark', it is proposed that 'somber' holds meanings which transcend geographical borders and trigger similar emotional reactions across cultures. For example, the English 'somber' has very similar meaning as the Romanian 'sobru', the Spanish 'sombrio', the German

‘traurig’, the Italian ‘cupo’, the Korean 침울한, the Chinese 沉痛的, the Arabic بائس, or the Russian мрачный.

6.2.3 Adding to Theory

As mentioned, Sharpley and Stone (2009, p. 251) propose that the importance of dark tourism research lies ‘in what it reveals or may reveal, about the relationships between life and death, the living and dead, and the institutions or processes that mediate, either at the individual or societal level, between life and death.’ Even so, Light (2017) notices there has been limited interest to develop or apply theory in order to understand the consumption of sites of death and suffering, and, especially, to identify features which distinguish this phenomenon from other forms of tourism.

The most intricate and popular theory developed by now is Stone’s ‘mortality mediation’ (2009, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). This theory stems from an existential paradox of contemporaneity. On the one hand, the decline of organized religion and the transformation of death into a taboo topic have removed the means through which people could make sense of their own inevitable death. On the other hand, death has become an integral part of the contemporary popular culture which has replaced religion as a means for making sense of death. Between these trends, traveling to sites associated with death and suffering provides people the platform to contemplate upon the nature of life and death, and attribute meaning to their inescapable demise by gazing at the death of others.

From this perspective, the ‘mortality mediation’ theory draws upon the sociology of death to propose dark tourism as a mediating institution between the living and the dead.

The current study brings together theories from medical psychology (IPA), linguistics (Peircean semiotics), and history (Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de Mémoire* project) to conceptualize *les milieux de mémoire sombre*. This concept basically promotes experiences with sites associated with death and suffering as functions of memory processes, where people retrieve autobiographical memories which they articulate in what they perceive to be meaningful and coherent narratives to suture themselves to the master narrative of the site. This results in a fluid negotiation of meaning between individual and collective memories which supports a sustained process of identitarian co-construction between people and site.

6.2.4 Generalizing Findings

‘In a good IPA study’, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009, p. 38) propose, ‘it should be possible to parse the account both for shared themes, and for the distinctive voices and variations on those themes’. Such an approach to research, Malim, Wadeley, & Birch (1992) argue, addresses the uniqueness and wholeness of the individual with the purpose of providing a general as well as a particular vision of participants’ experience. This ability to highlight both unique perspectives and shared experiential themes is one of the main beneficial features of IPA (Smith, 2004). On the other hand, the same feature can be perceived as a weakness of the approach. Malim, Wadeley, & Birch (1992) warn that idiographic studies tend to be subjective, impressionistic and intuitive which results in

low potential for generalizations. In turn, this can make it difficult to assess and establish the importance of variables (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Nevertheless, following the interpretivist tradition, studies employing IPA do not seek to find one single answer or generalized truth. In a rather extreme standpoint, Denzin (1983, p. 133) states: 'the interpretivist rejects generalization as a goal'. This argument is based on the fact that human interactions and lifeworld phenomena always have multiple meanings based on the subjective perspectives of people in specific situations, which leads to an inherent indeterminateness in the lifeworld and forbids generalizations (Mayring, 2007). While acknowledging the impossibility of broad generalizations, Reid, Flowers, & Larkin (2005) consider the commonalities across cases and interpretative analytical commentaries to have wider positive implications. This is in line with Caldwell's (2008, cited in Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011) proposal that the theoretical findings obtained from IPA studies may have a more valid contribution to wider literature, to 'Theory' with a capital 'T', than some quantitative studies would acknowledge. Thus, IPA research adopts a mediating position between any extreme points for and against generalization. 'Moderatum generalization', Williams (2002, p. 131) states, is 'where aspects of S can be seen to be instances of a broader recognizable set of features. This is the form of generalization made in interpretive research'. It also reinforces Warnock's (1987) point that gaining insight into the particular takes us closer to the universal. In this way, the particular 'essence' of the individual brings people 'closer to significant aspects of a shared humanity' (Smith, 2004, p. 43), which links the idiographic nature of IPA to Husserlian phenomenological psychology (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Taking all of these

aspects into account, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009, p. 51) advise IPA researchers to think in terms of ‘theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability’.

Except for the theoretical contribution mentioned in the previous section – the multidisciplinary conceptualization of *les milieux de mémoire sombre* – the study also proposes two models which are replicable across sites, groups, and contexts. Each of them can be replicated as long as the investigated group or site is placed in the relevant framework of social, cultural, and political transgenerational shared memory. For example, notions of Chineseness (Li, 2008), Hungarianness (Rickly-Boyd & Metro-Roland, 2010), or Britishness (Jacobson, 1997; Langlands, 1999) have been developed throughout literature to refer to frames of collective memories.

6.2.5 For Non-Academics

By understanding the highly political aspect of sites of dark and contested heritage, usually camouflaged in subtle symbolism and selective narrative, *visitors* can avoid being manipulated into believing that the information presented is the ultimate and undisputed version of the truth. Acknowledging that most of the times a memorial is more than meets the eye can encourage them to gain enough information and experience before the visit. This has the potential to boost their understanding of the multilayered and multidimensional narratives they encounter, which, in turn, is believed to make their visiting experience meaningful. For the *tourism industry* dealing with Romanian tourists, being aware of the relevance of Romanian Common Knowledge and Romanianness in modern times can support them in tailoring more appropriate tours and securing increased

business. *Developers* of memorials and museums focused on sensitive and painful historical periods or events may find the findings in the current study useful for designing a balanced interpretation which considers the needs and expectations of affected stakeholders.

6.3 Conclusion and Future Research

‘The traces left by past events never move in a straight line, but in a curve that can be extended into the future’, proposed historian Marc Bloch in a 1940-statement (1999, p. 118), to which in 1941 he added that ‘historical facts are, in essence, psychological facts’ (1954, p. 194). Decades later, his words resonate throughout the current study, whose findings expose the experience with sites associated with death and suffering as functions of co-constructive memory processes between the individual and the collective which transcend spatiality and temporality. The present research employs a bricolage of psychological, linguistic, and historical theories and tools rarely used before in the tourism academia to offer a thorough framework of understanding of how memory, narrative, place identity, and place construction are meaningfully connected in an integrated experiential approach which challenges the classical demand and supply perspectives on tourism to sites associated with death and suffering. This study argues that adopting multidisciplinary research approaches to investigate visitors’ experience through the proposed memory – narrative – place identity – place construction nexus is beneficial, as this connection encourages both the development of new theory – such as *les milieux de*

mémoire sombre – and the exploration of classical topics such as interpretation, motivations, and authenticity from new perspectives.

The findings support the idea that suffering has become an integral part of the contemporary popular culture, and reinforce the argument that contemporary society is characterized by a ‘memory craze’ (Megill, 1998), or ‘memory boom’ (Winter, 2007). However, in contrast with the dark tourism literature, which stresses the fascination with death as the reason for traveling to sites associated with death and suffering, the findings propose that people engage with such sites motivated not by thanatouristic reasons, but by more meaningful ones, such as identitarian regeneration, educational enrichment, commemoration of the deceased, a sense of nationhood, and feelings of ‘never forget’ or ‘never again’. On a closer look, these expectations and the subsequent behaviors are rooted in trans-generational collective memory. While following the master narrative of the site, visitors also actively participate in the co-construction of this narrative by consciously or not attributing meaning to the site interpretation in the form of autobiographical memories and narratives. In turn, this leads to place identity as it allows for the development of what Anderson (1981) has called ‘imagined communities’. This is because, as mentioned before, places associated with death and suffering have the potential to trigger profoundly emotional and meaningful experiences which distinguish this phenomenon from other forms of tourism (Nawijn, Isaac, van Liempt, & Gridnevskiy, 2016). The findings also challenge Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de Mémoire* thesis where he announced the irreversible subjugation of memory by history. Adopting an interpretivist, analytical, and reflective stance exposes the experience with places associated with death and suffering as imbued with ever-so-present, relevant, and influential memory. Based on

this, it is argued that such sites are not *les lieux de mémoire*, but a special type of *les milieux de mémoire* conceptualized in the present study as *les milieux de mémoire sombre* or *places of somber memories*.

The current study is in perfect congruence with Shaprley and Stone (2009), Stone (2016), and Light (2017) to argue that – more important than contradicting about definitions or endlessly debating whether or not (dark) tourism is a field of research in itself – exploring the phenomenon of traveling to sites associated with death and suffering is important for its ability to expose multidimensional and multi-layered facets of contemporary life. This is because – as seen in this paper – topics of death and identity have the potential to trigger a wide variety of dormant, deep, and intense emotions, memories, and beliefs which may remain hidden in other forms of tourism. For this reason, it is proposed that academia may greatly benefit from adopting recent developments in other (social) sciences. Also, the present research imperatively calls for (dark) tourism academia to engage more recent contexts of death and repression. Most totalitarian Communist regimes, for example, have fallen around 1989 while others have continued into contemporaneity. At the same time, the recent decades have witnessed escalated conflicts, forced migration, and the revival of totalitarian regimes across the world. Investigating such trends, regions, and sites by giving voice to different stakeholders – albeit sensitive – is believed to provide a complex and holistic understanding of the modern-day humanity and, in turn, to transform the tourism industry into an active promoter of international peace which transcends national and cultural borders.

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8. APPENDIX: Identity *Of* The Sighet Memorial Museum: The Semiotic Reading (continued from page 234)

Stepping out of the ‘Maps Room’, visitors enter a long corridor which stretches from one side of the prison to the other. This corridor exhibits a portrait gallery of thousands of former political prisoners and deportees (Figure 10). Most of these portraits are taken during the years of imprisonment, so they display individuals in the prison uniform with thin and sad faces. Here, visitors are taken aback by the magnitude of suffering. If the ‘Maps Room’ depicts suffering abstractly, this gallery gives suffering a human face the visitors can connect with. The suffering is signified iconically – through each portrait, and symbolically – when observing the gallery of portraits as a never-ending whole. The suffering is amplified for visitors who identify family members among those portrayed. For such visitors, the specific portrait and the Sighet Memorial Museum symbolically become bridges over time and anchors for the future.



Figure 10 : Portrait Gallery of Political Prisoners

The following room in the visitation trajectory is 'The Romania of the prisons' (room 6). This room tells the story of the Romanian gulag through a sequence of statistics and graphs, photographs and descriptions of the central prisons, testimonials, documents of repression, and personal items of political prisoners. The statistics and graphs are meant to complement the photographs and descriptions of prisons towards iconically signifying the magnitude and diversity of oppression during the Communist regime. According to official interpretation, more than two million people were politically persecuted, out of which approximately 600,000 were imprisoned between 1945 and 1989. To deal with the overflow of penitentiaries, the authorities developed forced labor camps which received more than 200,000 deportees.

A section entitled 'The bureaucracy of repression' presents different types of documents used against those presumably opposing the regime. For example, the arrest warrant for a 17-year old student accused of public agitations against the government for disrespecting a portrait of Stalin. Other documents are asking the family members of those arrested to evacuate their house and/or give up their possessions to the authorities. There are signed statements of informants based on which individuals were arrested, documents confirming executions of opponents, and daily warden's reports recommending punishment for actions such as lying on the bed, looking outside the window, or whistling. One important document is the death certificate for Iuliu Maniu, one of the most important and respected politicians in the history of Romania, former prime minister, president of the National Peasant Party, imprisoned by the Communist regime in 1947 and died at the Sighet Prison in 1953. On the death certificate, under 'occupation', the authorities wrote 'no occupation'. In fact, as another document in the room explains, all of those for whom

death certificates were developed had ‘no occupation’. The same macabre stereotypes are used for the ‘cause of death’ section of the death certificates. No matter if detainees died of prison-caused suicide or diseases, starvation, or executions, their death certificates state reasons such as ‘blood pressure’, ‘heart failure’, ‘tuberculosis’, ‘hypertension’, or ‘stroke’. Another type of documental manipulation is the writing of death certificates much later than the prisoners’ demise dates. As one example shows, the death certificate of Major Dabija – executed in 1949 – was developed 14 years later. The absurdity of such falsehood indexically signifies the corrupt and cynical nature of the regime. It is presumed it also iconically provokes strong negative emotional reactions among Romanian visitors.

Many of these reports, certificates and informative notes are written in poor Romanian and contain spelling and grammar mistakes as well as illogical formulations. Also, they are written in limited and mechanical vocabulary – for example, the repeated use of ‘reactionary elements’, ‘hostile elements’, or ‘enemy of the people’ - which the Romanians colloquially refer to as ‘limbă de lemn’⁶³ (‘wooden language’). This linguistic

⁶³ In his prophetic masterpiece *1984*, Orwell (1949) notes that people’s political opinions depend upon the language they are speaking. Scholars such as Arendt (1951), Milgram (1963, 1965, 1974), Lifton (1989), and Zimbardo & Leippe (1991) have extensively written on the combined use of linguistic and repressive techniques used by totalitarian regimes for manipulating the masses into obedience. Gross (2002, p.238) argues that language is the most important means for cultural production in totalitarian Socialist states where it ‘functions as an instrument of social control by depriving human beings of the opportunity to check their ideas against the evidence derived from experience’. Slama-Cazacu (1991) defines the ‘limbă de lemn’ (‘wooden language’) as a subsystem of a language referring mostly to the lexical elements and phraseological units turned into inflexible expressions and clichés with a predetermined meaning by a certain authority and mostly used as dogmatic stereotypes to express an ideology. In totalitarian Romania, it was imposed as a dogma through a mixture of forced, compulsory memorization and fear (Slama-Cazacu, 2009). The main features of the wooden language are: Manichaeism (a world radically divided between two adverse and irreconcilable sides – the universally evil imperialist camp and the absolutely good Socialist camp – where each concept is defined through the fundamental communist-enemy filter); a perception of society as an immense organism where the part is vitally subordinated to the whole and

phenomenon is also clearly visible on another displayed panel entitled ‘Dispositions, decrees, reports’, where official documents speak of the ‘re-education of those elements hostile to the Popular Republic of Romania’, ‘attempt to jeopardize the popular democratic regime’, ‘attempt to slow down the construction of Socialism’, ‘hostile and dubious elements who, in times of a sharpening class struggle, undermine and sabotage our regime and the act of constructing Socialism’, ‘parasitic and speculative elements who live on the back of the working people’, and ‘counter-revolutionary elements’. The following case further exemplifies the use of the wooden language: one important sparsely written two-page decree on display mentions the word ‘elements’ eight times, ‘construction of Socialism’ three times, ‘hostile’ four times, ‘dubious’ or ‘suspicious’ three times, ‘motherland’ or ‘our country’ four times, and ‘regime’ four times. This example demonstrates the use of the wooden language as a strategic tool focused on frequent repetition of inflexible clichés and dogmatic stereotypes with predetermined and imposed meanings aimed at expressing an ideology which annihilates alternative and individual thinking and acting, encourages hatred among societal layers, instills fear, and imposes authority. Adding to this is a quote in large, red font by Alexandru Drăghici – the former Minister of Internal Affairs and chief of the Securitate – which reads: ‘The

where the individual learns one’s mechanical role through education and propaganda; lack of innovation and paralysis of rational and independent thinking; poor vocabulary focused on militaristic terminology; a predilection for comparison; passive and impersonal lexical constructions; aggressive repetition and improper use of hyperbolae and euphemisms; an imperative tone calling for action; and a vague, abstract, redundant style aimed at delivering a predetermined and expected message according to a known ritual (compiled from: Thom, 1993; Betea, 2004; Zafiu, 2007; Necula, 2008; Rad, 2009; Semeniuc, 2011; Ilie, 2014). Crețu (2010) and Armăsar (2012) show the organic nature of the wooden language by revealing its new shapes and forms in post-Communist Romania.

Securitate was and is an instrument of the Party. It is compelled to respect the law, but we can twist the law as we please'. The chromatic choice iconically signifies the traditional color of Communist movements worldwide, while symbolically signifying what has become known in the collective mentality as the Red Holocaust⁶⁴ and the suffering it has inflicted.

Displayed close to each other are an original jacket one used to wear before being imprisoned, and a complete prison uniform surrounded by barbed wire. In itself, the striped black-and-white prison uniform⁶⁵ has become an international symbol for forced separation and deprivation of freedom. Considering it is identical to the uniform worn by Auschwitz prisoners, the atrocious genocidal perception is iconically extrapolated to the Communist prisons in Romania. This is further reinforced by the barbed wire – whose symbolism has already been discussed - surrounding the uniform on display.

A series of panels spread across the room depict prison victims' testimonials. Some speak of the medical conditions, for example: 'There was medical assistance only on paper. A prisoner in the adjoining cell had become seriously ill. The warden asked four of the prisoner's cellmates to carry him to the infirmary on a blanket. The medical attendant, Oprea, who was a beast, got a cosh and began furiously hitting those transporting the sick prisoner' (Remus Radina, Jilava Prison). Other speak of the living conditions in the cells, for example: 'there were no beds, only mats made of straw placed

⁶⁴ On the Red Holocaust: Mătrescu (2008), Wolton, Slăvescu, Courtois, & Rusan (2001), Rosefielde (2009).

⁶⁵ For symbolism of the prison uniform: Shaw (1973), Cohn & Udolf (1979).

directly on the floor' (Ion Diaconescu, Aiud Prison), or 'the window was covered on the outside with wooden boards' (Ion Ioanid, Aiud Prison). Yet others speak about the relationships among prisoners, for example: '[...] mathematics, physics were taught. Anything was taught, history was taught. It was a big school, a small university. Due to the fact that the prisoners in Gherla were very smart and cultured and honest people. And they started taking care of and teaching us. This was never allowed, and the authorities severely punished any professor teaching a course. Heavily beaten! Thus, these talks, these conferences, were always held so we could walk the whole day. We were not even allowed to sit down on the edge of the bed, we had to stand up the entire day' (Emeric Lay, Gherla Prison). There are also statements of strikes, protests, rebellions, and prison escapes. When seen through the lens of Romanian Orthodox aforementioned values of carrying one's heavy cross, freedom, compassionate love, and Last Judgement, such testimonials iconically and symbolically signify the victims' suffering, sacrifice, resistance to compromise, dedication to one's physical and moral freedom, and the expected salvation of their souls.

Scattered on boards around the room are tens of letters sent by political prisoners to their loved ones during their imprisonment. As documents went through a thorough censoring filter before leaving the penitentiary, all the letters – most of them postcards – tend to have a similar format: limited length, a short affectionate greeting line, an update of one's condition, a precise list of much needed items, and short affectionate wishes at the end. For example: 'My beloved, I am healthy. I have been waiting to receive the clothes I have asked you for. I am cold. I am prone to falling ill. Send straight away, even if the parcel is returned to you. Do not send food at all, until you hear from me again.

Urgently send >> opinci << [peasant's sandals], trousers, >> dimie << [thick traditional homespun], two shirts, >> pieptar << [traditional vest], thick hat, socks, gloves. Then: a suit, shoes, a bed sheet, two pairs of underwear. I need everything I asked for. Write CLOTHING on the parcel. I have waited for three months already in urgency. Take care of me. I wish you loads of [unreadable]. N.D. Stroescu-Șovarna' (Peninsula-Valea Neagră forced labor camp). Another example is: 'My dear, I am well, healthy, and still in the Oradea Penitentiary. Please send the child to school, Grandpa should support [him/her] in exchange for our goods in Craiova. My dear Sabina, wait for me faithfully and take care of the little one. I am hugging and kissing you. St'. These letters send the most dramatic meanings and messages by accessing the deepest and most private aspects of human experience. The short greeting lines – such as 'Dear Mummy', 'My dear little girl and my dear children!', 'Dear wife and little children', or 'Dear mother, sister, Marie, Ghiță, and Florică' – gain important and dramatic meanings when understanding the archaic and religious significations family has in Romanian society. The entire cycle of life represented by its three major pillars – birth, wedding, and death – happens within and strongly influence the family. Thus, the value of family is the value of life itself in all of its physical and metaphysical aspects. It represents the Genesis as it comes from creation and continues to create, it is the coming together of two incomplete halves into a perfect whole, and it bridges generations by paying forward the thread of tradition. For Romanians, the family is sacred⁶⁶, as suggested by the fact that birth, wedding, and death

⁶⁶ Evdokimov has written extensively on the sacrality of marriage and family in Orthodox Christianity. He argues that the sacramental union of husband and wife makes of them one hypostasis, and the

are existentially connected to the Church through rituals such as the baptism, the wedding ceremony, and the funeral. Seen through this filter, the greeting lines in the prisoners' letters symbolically suggest their intense suffering caused by the longing for their families. In many cases, there were months or even years with absolutely no communication between the political prisoners and their families, so there was never any assurance that their letters or parcels would reach the addressee⁶⁷. Adding to this

relationship between them is like 'the Trinity [where] each of the terms exists only in relation to the others. Each achieves its own unity only in the overall unity with the other. Such is the miracle of love: each person signifies the two others' (Evdokimov, 1994, p.11). Evdokimov employs the saying of Ramuz 'one and one cease to be two, and remain one', to which he adds that: 'they do not become but remain one, which means that they rediscover and restore their initial mysterious unity' (2001, p.47). 'Between the two lovers there is only God who is the third term', and the purpose of marriage is achieving plenitude, a church (Evdokimov, 1994, p.42-44). Similarly, Stăniloae notes that two young people sharing a pure love for each other live in an unspoken presence of God between them (cited in Dumitrescu, 1992). At marriage, one develops into a complete human being by becoming both man and woman in the spirit of God (Stăniloae, cited in Dumitrescu, 1992). Their sacramental union freely creates, out of the abundance of love, a reflection of the self in the world, 'a new face that is called to become an icon of God' (Evdokimov, 1994, p.121). This union is established from the beginning in Paradise, where Adam was created in the image of Christ and Eve in the image of the Church (Evdokimov, 1994). As it existed before the couple, '[t]he love of Christ for the Church becomes the archetype of marriage' (Evdokimov, 1994, p.126). In the same vein, Stăniloae compares marriage with Christ's sacrificial love for mankind, and argues that love involves one's assumption of responsibility for the other's importance and value, and especially for the other's salvation of the soul (Stăniloae, cited in Dumitrescu, 1992). Țicleanu (2014) builds upon Stăniloae's philosophy to show how, over centuries, the Romanian traditional family has reflected its role as 'the small Church', while the Romanian Orthodox Church has represented 'the large family'.

⁶⁷ Roșca (2003) and Nițu (2011) write about the regime of complete isolation the political prisoners at Sighet Prison were subjected to. 'The regime of isolation at the Sighetu Marmăției Prison over the five years and six months the dignitaries were imprisoned here for was total, even absurd. [...] For this entire period, no dignitary spoke to anyone except for the Securitate officers investigating them. For five years and six months no parcel or letter arrived for the prisoners in the Sighet Penitentiary. Over this period, the two hundred prisoners had neither the right nor the possibility to send letters. [...] The prisoners' families sought news about them at the high levels of authority. One the occasions they received an answer, it was vague, stating he/she was held in one of the penitentiaries in the country but not mentioning which one. From survivors' testimonials we found out about cases when families who continued inquiring about their detainee would be informed that he/she had passed away, even if he/she was still alive. In order for the family to believe this answer, a Securitate officer would visit the detainee's family, offer them the watch and wedding ring who had belonged to the alleged deceased, so that the family would stop asking questions. [...] The only communication the Sighet Penitentiary had was with the General Directorate of Penitentiaries in Bucharest. It only concerned the demise of prisoners and involved

metaphysical torment is the physical one, as indexically suggested by the urgency of their calls for food and clothing. Beyond the brutality of wardens, starvation⁶⁸ and cold⁶⁹ are some of most widespread means used by the Communist authorities in Romania for exterminating their political opponents. By accessing the depths of the human condition linked to emotional and physical suffering, the displayed letters iconically raise complex emotions, from empathy and respect to indignation and revolt.

Also displayed in several cases in room 6 are items handmade by detainees during their imprisonment. For example: two combs, a miniature book sculpted in bone by a pupil, a bar of soap used in detention, a spectacle case, sewing needles made of bone and

a certain code. This, the message for Iuliu Maniu's death was '>>Light bulb no.2 went out<<' (Roșca, 2003, p.152-154).

⁶⁸ Romanian historian Constantin C. Giurescu described the permanent and tormenting hunger he experienced during his 5-year imprisonment at the Sighet Penitentiary: 'On the third day of detention I started being hungry, an almost permanent hunger which turned into an obsession in the last days of imprisonment. Half an hour after finishing lunch, you get hungry again; the sensation grows gradually and reaches its peak at 5:30pm, when the bell announcing dinner usually rings. After the evening plain broth, you do not even get the noon half an hour-break; by the time you finish eating you are already hungry' (Giurescu, 1994, p.73-74). Andreica (2003, p.32-33) depicts the psychological changes he experienced because of hunger in the Sighet Prison: 'Hunger is not only felt through the stomach grinding empty. It is felt through all the cells of the body. It is felt with the meat that is left, with the weakened bones, the skin, the fingernails, and the hair on one's head. All are struggling, are screaming with hunger. Hunger leads to psychological changes. Man becomes irascible, angry, hateful, ready to fight with one's neighbor. [...] Starving people is a specifically Communist technique. It is based on a Mephistophelian plan. It is a technique for complete dumbing of individuals. The villain starves man, turning him/her into naught. Man gets reduced to the level of a pig squealing for leftovers. [...] Hunger induces a significant depreciation of the human personality, to the level of an irrational beast. The hunger feels small, while seeing the villain as a giant with supreme rights over him/her'.

⁶⁹ There are many testimonials on the cold conditions the prisoners were kept in. For example: 'One morning, all of us – the ill – are brought into the main hall and undressed to the skin for a thorough search. It was still winter, cold, and we had bare feet for the very slow search. We were barefoot on the cement without the possibility to wear at least socks. Cold and shivers made my teeth chatter. [...] Keeping us naked in the cold while addressing us insults and making stupid jokes about us were only meant to humiliate us and destroy our personality' (Popa, 1999, p.106). A similar instance is provided by Romanian philosopher Petre Țuțea, who spent 13 years in the Communist prisons of Romania: at the Jilava Prison, 'they isolated me in a room, at winter, with the windows open. I was brought back to the cell once I had already started bleeding at the nose. My cell mates massaged me and I warmed up. At one moment, in that cold weather, I wanted to die so badly' (cited in Preda, 1992, p.13).

wood, a cross-shaped pendant, a small cross and heart made of aluminum, or a little heart made of a toothbrush. There is also a wooden box handmade by a political prisoner which was posthumously sent to his wife containing her deceased husband's watch and death certificate. Being original handmade items, they indexically create a direct emotional connection between their users and artisans - the political prisoners - and the museum visitors. They touch upon important leitmotifs in Romanian tradition already discussed in this study, which presumably strengthens this emotional identitarian bond between visitors and the political prisoners.

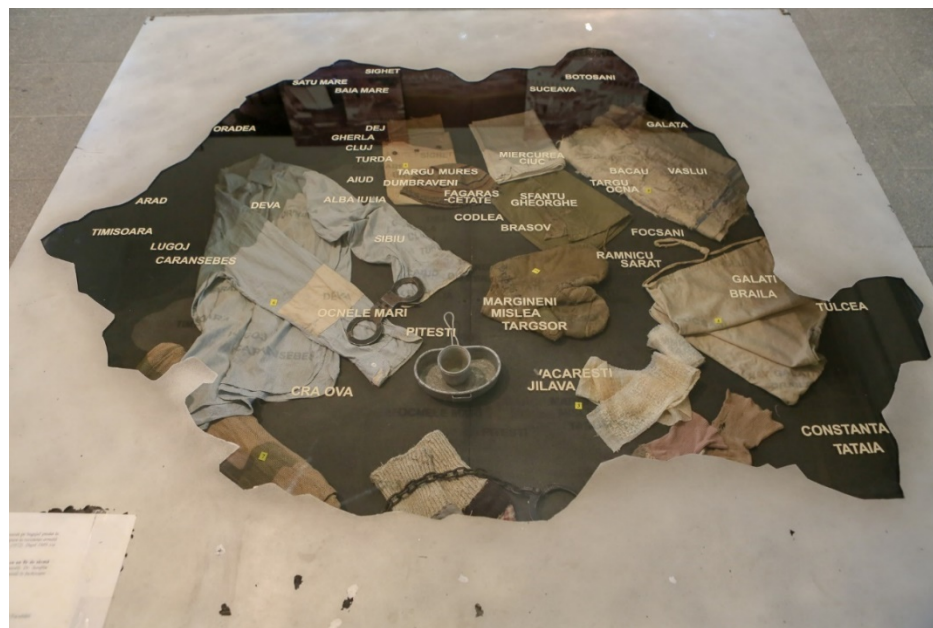


Figure 11 : Glass Case Depicting the Map of Communist Repression in Romania

An essential exhibit in this room is a horizontal case whose glass depicts the map of Romania on which names of the main repressive sites of the Communist regime are marked (Figure 11). If the collective suffering was abstractly depicted – through crosses – on the map in room 5, it is given a human perspective in room 6 by linking it to settlements. A series of items which had belonged to the political prisoners can be seen

through the glass: a cloth knapsack made in prison, gloves and hood used at the Canal forced labor camp, a detainee's haversack, clothing items, a dictionary made by a political prisoner at the Canal forced labor camp, a hat, and pouch which had belonged to ethnographer Ernest Bernea, a cloth label made at the Peninsula labor camp by a member of the armed anti-Communist resistance, and a medical bandage poetry was sewn in with a broom wire. Scattered among these items are handcuffs and chains which had been used for repressing political opponents. This case is an intricate semiotic structure: seeing these items through the glass depicting the map of Romania and the sites of repression indexically signifies individual narratives of resistance, of carrying one's Christian Cross, in a context of collective national suffering.

The physical and metaphysical core of the room is represented by a vertically-placed massive prison cell door brought here from the former Communist prison in Galați, where, according to the official museum interpretation, the great educators of Romanian democracy – Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache – were imprisoned before being moved to Sighet (Figure 12). The Door, Gate, and Threshold⁷⁰ have significant meanings for the archaic Romanian which are closely related to the aforementioned cycle of life. The threshold is the place where the souls of the ancestors gather when summoned, the keeper

⁷⁰ Eliade (2007) describes the rich and dramatic symbolic meaning of the (door's and gate's) Threshold in Romanian archaic thinking: it is a magical creature, a master with invisible powers who oversees all the major events in one's life. The first passing over a threshold represents the passing into the real and evil life outside of one's protective house. The bride and groom passing the threshold on their wedding day means all worldly evil remains on the outside of the house. At one's demise, the body is solemnly carried over the threshold to his/her final resting place ('loc de veci'). This moment represents a closure of one's cycle of life, but the Gate and Threshold remain to oversee other births, weddings, and deaths.

of energies for those residing there, but also the place where the outside evil spirits gather⁷¹. The sacrality of the threshold is reflected in the numerous magical rituals and superstitions linked to rites of passage across the three main stages of the Romanian cycle of life⁷². One of the most widespread Romanian superstitions for birth advises the mother to not stay too long under the threshold for she may have long and complicated labor. For weddings, it is expected that the groom will carry the bride over the threshold as a symbol of union and prosperity. A popular death-related belief among Romanians is that the soul of the deceased sits on the threshold for three days during the death watch to make sure it is adequately treated by the living. Rituals of carrying the deceased under the threshold – known as the rite of the Great Passing – are meant to secure a smooth separation of the individual from the community and the house he lived in, and to protect the living against the evil spirits of the outside world. A widespread Orthodox belief symbolically associates the door and gate with the Gates of the Kingdom of Heaven⁷³ which Christ has opened through His sacrificial crucifixion and made available to all humans who follow in His footsteps. Considering its central location in the room and the exhibits surrounding it, the prison cell door sends strong and conflictual meanings and messages to the visitors in three ways: in itself, as a meeting point, and as a transition. In itself, it indexically signifies the repressive nature of the Communist regime. When compared to the protective and

⁷¹ In Romanian mythology, one's house is sacred as it represents an *imago mundi* in small scale and the world is a divine creation (Eliade, 2007). Thus, the door, the gate, and the threshold involve a rite of passage from the Sacred to the Profane (Eliade, 1992).

⁷² For a comprehensive synthesis of rituals involving the door, gate, and threshold in the main stages of the Romanian cycle of life: Berdan (1994-1998). As the main rites of passage in one's life involve the entrance to his/her house, Berdan (1994-1998) refers to it as the Gate of Existence.

⁷³ Stăniloae (2002), McGrath (2003), Pârvu (2011).

sacred attributes of one's house door, the prison door symbolically signifies the broken thread of continuity of the Romanian tradition caused by the change of political system. It also symbolizes the melting point of individual and personal suffering into the collective national one. Furthermore, it iconically signifies the meeting point between dialectical existential dualities of the Romanian gulag: opportunities – limitations; freedom – oppression; protection – fear; privacy – surveillance; resistance – fall; the Gates of Heaven – the Gates of Hell. Through the same filter linking the Romanian thought to the displayed items, the prison cell door symbolically signifies several societal transitions the instauration of the Communist regime has generated: from societal and familial communion to class hate, from individual to uniformized personality, from working for existence to working for survival, from critical thought and speech to wooden language and indoctrination, from a focus on external enemies to a hunt for internal political opponents, from progress through merit and hard work to progress through obedience and delation, from an open democratic society to a closed totalitarian one.



Figure 12 : Original Prison Cell Door from the Galați Penitentiary

Advancing through the narrative trajectory, visitors reach the former cells of the Sighet Prison. Upon the entrance of this section, they are taken aback by an elaborated semiotic melange (Figure 13). The entrance to this section is represented by the original prison gates. Prison gates are international symbols for forced separation and lack of freedom.



Figure 13 : Entrance to the Main Body of the Sighet Memorial Museum

This grated entrance is flanked by two panels mentioning the Bible quote ‘Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32) in 33 languages. This quote gains meaning through proposing Truth a means for achieving the aforementioned pillar of Christianity: Freedom. Its translation in 33 languages is meant to symbolically internationalize the suffering of the victims of the Romanian gulag. Through these gates, the three floors of prisons cells can be seen to the left and right of a corridor. This corridor leads to the central focus point represented by the second part of Camilian Demetrescu’s ‘Homage to the Political Prisoner’ sculpture. Similarly, to the one by the entrance, this

sculpture also depicts a distorted cross. The dark cross on a light background is meant to symbolically signify the life-death duality, according to the chromatic symbolism previously discussed. The horizontal section of the cross is wider than usual and represents an inward spiral leading towards a vertical eye-shaped opening of a light background. The divine light⁷⁴ is a fundamental concept for Orthodox Romanians, as seen from the first lines of the Book of Genesis: 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, >> Let there be light <<, and there was light. God saw that light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light >> day << and the darkness he called >> night <<. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day'. This teaching on the Creation of the world is well known among Christians, and, through this filter, the sculpture

⁷⁴ Stăniloae has written extensively on the Orthodox understanding of the diving light. He speaks about the uncreated light of God, without which '[t]he human being and the world and their relation are only illumined partially and, because the world and the human being are considered as representing the ultimate reality in them, they are surrounded by darkness. The world and the human being are fully illumined only through their Author who lies above them' (Stăniloae, 1993, cited in Agachi, 2013, p. 127). Light is also the communicated abundant love produced by humans' union with God: 'The entire existence, from the uncreated and Creator God to the physical universe is an existence united through the love that exists between the persons and represents an existence that is joyful in all. This existence is a light that springs from God but communicates itself to the entire life' (Stăniloae, 1993, cited in Agachi, 2013, p. 128). He goes further to discuss the connection between the divine light and the word: 'The Word [of God] has this primary function: to show us the light, to reveal to us the meaning of the words and actions, but also to explain to us the true meaning of the existence of the human being, which cannot be known except within the communion in love with the human-loving God' (Stăniloae, 1993, cited in Agachi, 2013, p. 129). He also links light to the Transfiguration and Resurrection of Christ following His Crucifixion: 'His human nature was going to become, through the sacrifice, the environment of the divine light. [...] This light has a spiritual quality although it springs forth from the material human figure, just as the light of goodness show itself on the face of the Christian and especially in the nimbus of saints' (Stăniloae, 1993, cited in Agachi, 2013, p. 135). Lastly, he mentions the purification from sin and the work of the Holy Spirit toward Truth and Spirit as fundamental conditions for accessing the vision of the diving light (Stăniloae, 1993, cited in Agachi, 2013).

symbolically signifies the crossing between the dark, sinful, and painful world of the Communist prisons to the light, blissful, and loving realm of God. The entire semiotic complex comprised of the grated entrance, the ‘truth will set you free’ message, the three stories of prison cells (each depicting a certain aspect of the Romanian gulag), and the central corridor leading to the cross-shaped sculpture symbolically signifies that freedom and salvation can be achieved by revealing, assuming responsibility for, and paying forward the truth about the suffering and the resistance of the Romanian nation during the Communist regime.

Moving forward through the numbered rooms, room 8 talks about the elections of 1946⁷⁵. Stepping inside this room, visitors see on the left side a large panel displaying newspapers and propaganda posters used by the Soviet-backed Communists in the 1946 elections against the historical parties. Two clearly visible trends for Communist movements – already discussed in this paper - are the use of the red font and the class-dividing wooden language, such as: ‘the elections will be a battle between the Romanian people and Maniu’s and Brătianu’s clique of landlords and loan sharks’ or ‘down with Maniu who has betrayed the Romanian people!’. The opposite wall depicts documents and statements revealing the fraudulent methods employed by the Communists (dominating the Democratic Parties Block) to rig the elections. One statement reads: ‘On the morning of the 19th November 1946, Mayer Mișu Banu brought to the voting hall two urns full of voting bulletins already stamped on the >> Sun << and put locks on them,

⁷⁵ Important historic works on the rigged elections of 1946 and the purge of monarchy: Tismăneanu (2003), Deletant (2006), Stanomir (2006), Giurescu (2007), Focșeneanu (2014).

after which he allowed the observers to enter the hall. The delegates of the historical parties (the opposition) asked for the urns to be opened to confirm their emptiness. The prosecutor and the mayor rejected their request. [...] The mayor and the prosecutor communicated winning the elections with 98% of the votes to the regional headquarters of the Communist Party'. Another one reads: 'Our voting center was inside the Eastern Railway Station in Bucharest. I got there. On both sides of the entrance, aligned in a long row, were 20-30 sturdy men with clubs behind their backs or hidden in the grass. Their job was to silence, to hit the voters who had voted for the historical parties'. Yet another one reads: 'We, the gendarmes, were recruited by the Communists and not real gendarmes, and we voted three times: once in the morning before the voting procedure began, once in the afternoon, and once in the evening after the procedure ended'. Such statements iconically signify the nature of the Communist ruling in Romania: false, perverse, violent, and illegal. This is iconically supported by copies of documents and rigged voting bulletins, and reinforced by statements of foreign authorities in Romania⁷⁶. One of them reads: 'The Groza government falsified the elections and trampled our notes of protest. This forces us to refuse accepting the results of these rigged elections' (telegram sent to Washington by Burton Berry, the Chief of the USA Mission to Bucharest). Another one reads: 'The Romanian government organized general elections on 19th November 1946. The State Department possesses thorough reports on the development of these elections and the information we have clearly shows that, following

⁷⁶ Burger (2000) publishes the official report written in 1945 by American journalist Mark Ethridge – sent by the US State Department to monitor the situation in Romania – in which he details the fraudulent seizure of power by the Communists and King Michael's failed attempts to find international support.

the committed frauds, the style of voting, and the counting of votes, and because of intimidation through terror of a large segment of the voting population, the freedom of choice for a large part of the population was doubtful' (official statement of the USA on 26th November 1946). The central point of this room is an original voting urn with a double bottom (Figure 14). The side wall of the urn was removed, and the rigged voting bulletins were inserted at the beginning of the voting process. The real votes remained in the upper side of the urn and were not counted. This was but one method used by the Communists for falsifying the elections. This urn comes to indexically signify the fraudulent assumption of power by the Communist Party, while symbolically signifying the dishonest and illegitimate nature of the Communist regime in Romania.



Figure 14 : Original Double-bottom Voting Urn Used in the Rigged Elections of 1946

The following room – room 9 – is an *in situ* reconstruction of the cell where Iuliu Maniu died (Figure 15). Iuliu Maniu⁷⁷ exists in the collective Romanian mindset as a mythological political figure due to his proven patriotism and primarily due to his essential role in what became known as the Great Union – the union of Transylvania with Romania in 1918. He is known among Romanians as a great defender of democratic values and a dignified opponent of the Communist regime. His image among Romanians is contrasted by the conditions of his demise in the Sighet Prison. The first point of impact is the almost complete darkness because of the blinded windows. There are few items in the room, including a metal bed frame with a thin mattress, a prison uniform, a tin bowl for food, and a bucket for necessities. This *in situ* reconstruction indexically signifies the severe living conditions of the political prisoners in the Sighet Penitentiary, mainly since all of them were senior citizens. Considering Iuliu Maniu is perceived as an educator of



Figure 15 : *In Situ* Reconstruction of Iuliu Maniu's Prison Cell

⁷⁷ Biographical works on Iuliu Maniu: Maniu (1991), Stan (1997), Falcan (2016).

Romanian democracy, reconstructing the prison cell he died in symbolically signifies the death of democracy and the suffering brought by the instauration of the Communist regime.

The topic of next room – room 10 - is ‘The Communist Assault on Maramureș. Case Study: Ilie Lazăr’. In the winter of 1944, the Maramureș County was liberated from foreign occupation by the Romanian and Soviet armies, but the territory was not returned to Romania. Supported by the Soviet garrison, a group of local Communist activists attempted to annex this territory to Ukraine. A 15,000-participant march of peasants from regional villages obliged the Allied Control Commission to allow the return of Maramureș and other parts of Transylvania to Romania. These narratives are iconically backed up with the statements of two village mayors in Maramureș who resisted the forced Sovietization of the region and, subsequently, were convicted to 1.5 - 5 years in prison for their actions. An important role in this accomplishment is attributed to one of the most popular leaders of the National Peasant Party, Ilie Lazăr⁷⁸. He was a friend and supporter of Iuliu Maniu and had actively participated in the Great Union of 1918. Photos of him close to Iuliu Maniu, to the peasants, and to his family iconically signify Ilie Lazăr’s personality and, through the filter of fundamental pillars of archaic Romanian society already discussed (freedom, land, family), draw visitors’ appreciation and respect. Several

⁷⁸ American historian Reuben H. Markham portrays Ilie Lazăr: ‘He was handsome, full of life, with the looks of a romantic hero. He had the gift of speaking to peasants and workers and he was doing it with great efficiency, being one of the best political agitators I have ever met. He was honestly religious, although, probably, lacking great depths, but his very simple way of addressing the crowds made listeners feel as if they were seated around a table, having an equal discussion with a famous hero’ (Markham, 1996, p. 414). An important biographical work on Ilie Lazăr is Dobeș (2015).

documents present the Communist authorities' attitudes towards him. They depict Ilie Lazăr as 'a violent guy, who has to be categorically shown his place by his interrogators; he will not be allowed to divagate, and will be coerced to answer precisely to the questions; he must be stopped from interfering in debates when others will be asked about him'. Other documents show how he and other pro-occidental democrats were framed by the Communist authorities. Based on the setup in Tămădău on 14th July 1947, many leaders of the historical parties opposing the Communists were arrested, accused of treason and selling their country, and imprisoned in penitentiaries such as Sighet. Ilie Lazăr was convicted to 12 years of heavy imprisonment, five years of civic degradation, and the total confiscation of possessions. By adjoining the image of Ilie Lazăr as a political leader close to Romanian fundamental values to the documents revealing how he was treated by the Communist authorities, this room symbolically signifies the abrupt fracture of the thread of democracy and tradition inflicted by the instauration of the Communist regime. Adding materiality to this narrative is an original suitcase which belonged to Ilie Lazăr.

The following room – room 11 – broadens the stories of Iuliu Maniu and Ilie Lazăr and talks about 'The Destruction of the Democratic Political Parties'. As visitors enter the room, the wall to the left talks about the destruction of the National Peasant Party, the one in front talks about the Social Democrat Party, while the one to the right talks about the National Liberal Party. A historical chronology, profiles of their leaders, and their actions against the instauration of a Communist totalitarian regime are presented for each of the three main political parties, and they iconically signify the democratic timeline of Romania. Different items on display talk about the destructive fate of these parties during

the Communist rule. A panel talks about the destruction of the National Peasant Party. It shows a photo of the reconstruction of the Tămădău⁷⁹ frame-up following which all the leaders of the National Peasant Party were arrested, accused of ‘treason of the Romanian State’, and the Party was dissolved. Alongside are copies of the ‘Scântea’ official newspaper of the Communist Party issued in the subsequent days of the frame-up. The titles employ the same class-hate wooden language typical to the Communist Party communication already discussed in this paper (Figure 16). For example, ‘The gang of plotters, traitors of the nation, and spies have received their deserved punishment: Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache sentenced to heavy imprisonment for life’, ‘the gang of fugitives’, or ‘the entire nation calls for the nest of treason to be crushed!’.



Figure 16 : ‘Scântea’ Announcing the Sentencing of Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache

⁷⁹ On the Tămădău frame-up of the leaders of the historical parties: Vohn (2006), Onișoru (2008), Giurescu (2011), Pena (2016).

Due to being strongly rooted in the archaic Romanian values and lifestyle, the National Peasant Party were the strongest opponents to the instauration of the Communist regime. All around the room are portraits of the leaders of the historical parties during their imprisonment, including Iuliu Maniu, Ion Mihalache, Ghiță Pop, Corneliu Coposu, Victor Rădulescu-Pogoneanu, Constantin-Titel Petrecu, Constantin Dinu Brătianu, Aurelian Benteoiu, Dumitru Alimănișteanu, Radu Portocală, or Radu Romniceanu. Beyond their roles as leading political figures, many were academic personalities of Romania, and safe keepers of Romanian tradition and democratic values. It is mentioned that most of them passed away during their imprisonment in the Communist penitentiaries after years of suffering and humiliations. Seeing the portraits of such important political leaders sick and wearing prison uniforms instead of healthy and wearing their usual elegant clothing symbolically signifies the violent rupture of Romania's political, social, and cultural fabric of society brought by the Communist regime.

The narrative of the un-democratization of Romania is placed in an international context in room 12, themed: '1945: From Yalta to Moscow'. This room presents a chronology – iconically backed up by photographs – of the complete seizure of power in Romania by the Communist authorities. It is shown how this decision had been dictated by Moscow in October 1944, when Stalin and Churchill divided their spheres of influence. This decision was confirmed in the 1945 meeting between Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill at Yalta⁸⁰. King Michael of Romania sought Roosevelt's support, but his plea

⁸⁰ On the Yalta Conference and its effects on Eastern Europe: Clemens (1970), Georgescu (1993), Johnson (1996), Harbutt (2010), Plokhly (2010).

remained unanswered. With no international opposition, the Soviets installed their own government, worked on the suppression of the historical parties, and became the sole power following the 1946 rigged elections. A section is dedicated to the last instance of open resistance to Romania's Sovietization: the demonstration organized by the democratic youth in Bucharest on the 8th November 1945 to show their support for the King and aversion to Communism. This demonstration was repressed, and protesters were killed, wounded, or arrested⁸¹. Important themes arising in this room are those of betrayal, repression, totalitarianism, and resistance. They gain meaning when seen through the filter of archaic Romanian values already discussed – freedom, truth, carrying one's Cross – to symbolically signify the abrupt transition from an open and democratic society to a closed and totalitarian one. It is iconically suggested that this may not have happened had the nations who were supposed to protect Romania based on the international agreements at the time not secretly sided with the Soviet Union at the Yalta meeting.

The following room – room 13 – talks about the 'Repression against the Church', whose aim was to wipe out religious faith and instill dialectical-materialist atheism. Each of the four walls tells the story of a different aspect of the repression. As visitors walk into the room, the wall to the left depicts the repression against the Orthodox Church, the one to the right the repression against the two main branches of the Catholic Church (Greek and Roman), the back wall the repression against the Protestant cults, while the front wall depicts the Christian resistance against atheism. The panel depicting the

⁸¹ On the bloody repression of the last large pro-monarchic manifestation on 8th November 1945: (Lăcătușu & Burcea, 2010).

repression against the Orthodox Church⁸² is framed by tens of portraits of Orthodox clergy who were imprisoned by the Communist authorities. A chronology – iconically supported by documents and photos – is on display. Special sections are given to the physical destruction of churches. Important patrimonial Orthodox sites, such as the Enei Church, the Spirea Veche Church, or the Văcărești Monastery were demolished⁸³. As already mentioned, the Church is a fundamental existential pillar of Romanian tradition and lifestyle. One's earthly cycle of life revolves around the private house, while one's spiritual cycle of life revolves around the Church – known as the House of God. In Orthodox thought, each human is seen as a church where God works and rests. Orthodox believers are encouraged to build churches, meaning to help others discover their inner Godly nature. Thus, the facts and photos depicting the demolition of churches iconically signify the large-scale repression of the national faith and architectural tradition, while symbolically signifying the abrupt rupture of the moral and socio-cultural fiber of the Romanian society. Documents on display also reveal how believers were closely observed on special days such as Easter. These documents iconically signify the constant state of fear, suspicion, and lack of privacy which characterized the Romanian society during the Communist regime. Another section is dedicated to the special repressive measures against the 'Rugul Aprins'⁸⁴ movement. This was an intellectual and spiritual movement

⁸² Ionescu Stăniloae (2000) advances a number of over 10,000 imprisoned Orthodox clergy, while Ramet (2004) lowers it to 6,000. Romanian historian Vasile (2006) sees these numbers as exaggerations and, based on a thorough analysis of archives, proposes a more realistic number of approximately 2,000 arrested Orthodox clergy.

⁸³ A list of the Orthodox churches and monasteries demolished during the Communist regime in Romania: Ungureanu (2011).

⁸⁴ On the 'Rugul Aprins' movement: Oprea (2008a), Rădulescu (2009), Cleopa (2012), Scrima (2012), Ciornea (2016).

started at the Antim Monastery in Bucharest by illustrious figures of the Romanian society, such as priests Sandu Tudor, Benedict Ghiuș, and Sofian Boghiu, composer Paul Constantinescu, writers Vasile Voiculescu and Alexandru Mironescu, or architect Constantin Joja. The leader of the movement – Sandu Tudor – received a prison sentence of 25 years and passed away in the Aiud Penitentiary, while 15 other members of the group got sentenced to 5-25 years in prison. This iconically reinforces the rupture of the Romanian moral and cultural fiber of society. The wooden language is omnipresent in the displayed documents, for example: ‘legionary [fascist] and reactionary elements who had roles in the bourgeois and land-owning apparatus’, ‘the counterrevolutionary activity’, ‘turbulent and instigating elements’, ‘hostile elements’, ‘nest of mystics’, or ‘hostile attitude towards the popular democratic regime’.

The same style – focused on portraits, documents imbued in wooden language, and chronology - with similar meanings and effects is used for displaying the repression against the Catholic Church (Greek⁸⁵ and Roman⁸⁶) and the Protestant⁸⁷ cults (Figure 17). One Greek-Catholic figure emphasized here is Cardinal Iuliu Hossu⁸⁸ who was imprisoned at the Sighet Penitentiary between 1950 and 1955. Member of the Romanian

⁸⁵ Vasile (2006) synthesizes the repression against the Greek-Catholic Church: between 400 and 600 Greek-Orthodox clergy were imprisoned by the Communist authorities, some of them more than once; the Greek-Catholic Church was the only one completely abolished by the regime through Decree no. 358 on 1st December 1948 and all of their possessions were confiscated; almost all of the Greek-Catholic elite was imprisoned, most of them in the Sighet Penitentiary; the Greek-Catholic clergy were coerced to convert to Orthodoxy.

⁸⁶ Based on previous studies and Vatican archives, Vasile (2006) proposes the number of Roman-Catholic clergy imprisoned during the Communist regime to be between 150 and approximately 200.

⁸⁷ Vasile (2006) notes that the Protestant cults had less to suffer due to their positive relationship with the Communist authorities, while the research on the repression of the Neoprotestant cults is still in its incipient stage.

⁸⁸ Biographical works on Cardinal Iuliu Hossu: Bota (1994), Prunduș (2003), Grossu (2006), Hossu (2011).

Senate and honorific member of the leading academic institution of Romania – the Romanian Academy, he is well-known among Romanians for having read the declaration of the Great Union between Transylvania and Romania to the masses on 1st December 1918. His image in Romanian society is in stark contrast with the photos displaying him in prison uniform or deceased following his imprisonment. This contrast symbolically signifies the shift from a society ruled through meritocracy and patriotism to one ruled through fear and political loyalty. A similar figure for the Roman-Catholic Church is Vladimir Ghika⁸⁹, known as a prince of one of the most historical families of Romania, a writer, a philanthropist, and Catholic priest. Upon the instauration of the Communist regime, he refused to go into exile, was arrested in 1952 and accused of high treason, and passed away in 1954 due to the torturous treatment he was subjected to in prison. One panel in this room depicts him in his clerical outfit, surrounded by children, next to selected teachings which read: ‘To remember those who are forgotten means to lie down on God’s side who forgets no one. Our love must share others’ suffering; the least significant of us deserves we die for him. Even if He seems to answer rarely to us, God never stops listening. / To love God means to find the means of being happy even in the most atrocious of misfortunes. / We have more to expect from death than from life. Let’s not look back unless for going forward. / Few know how to suffer. Suffering is an art which, just like any real art, knows no recipe. / You are never less alone than when you are alone with God. / He who is close to God even in the deepest of pains, remains close

⁸⁹ Biographical works on his Eminence Vladimir Ghika: Cosmovici (2011), Băltăceanu, Brezianu, Broșteanu, Cosmovici, & Verly (2013), Ghika (2013), Mărtinaș & Velar (2013).

to Joy, because God is Joy, to the end of time'. Two quotes are displayed in a larger font than the others: 'Be happy for belonging to God, even if only for being punished', and 'There is nothing more patient [enduring] as a truth'. These selected teachings revolve around essential concepts already discussed - remembrance, Godly love, salvation, suffering, truth, resistance – to symbolically reinforce the message of aiming for the salvation of souls through remembering and following the examples of those who chose suffering over giving up their faith, values, and truth. The same message is symbolically transmitted through the portrayal of the Lutheran pastor Richard Wurmbrand⁹⁰, one of the few Protestant clerics who openly and publicly defied the Communist authorities. He was accused of high treason and spent almost 14 years in prison.

Two cases in this room complete each other in sending a symbolic message. One case encloses a stole who had belonged to the Greek-Catholic priest and political detainee Tertulian Langa. This fragile religious item is displayed next to a pair of heavy and rusty handcuffs. The other case contains items of casual clothing which had belonged to the same Tertulian Langa. Next to them, a prison uniform and a pair of rusty leg cuffs are displayed. These two cases symbolically signify the aggressive disturbance of physical and metaphysical values and lifestyle brought by the instauration of the Communist regime in Romania.

⁹⁰ Autobiographical works on the experience in the Communist prisons: Wurmbrand (1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1995).



Figure 17 : The Repression of the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches

The last section in this room briefly presents the Christian resistance to atheism. Documents and original books on religion by Marx, Engels, and Lenin indexically signify the attempts made by the Communist authorities to instill atheism through the political subjugation of the leading Churches, or the purge of those who could not be subjugated, and through mass indoctrination towards materialist values. This panel of information is flanked by the two blinded prison cell windows. Unlike the regular cell windows in Communist prisons which were blinded with wooden boards so that prisoners could not look outside, these windows are covered in stained-glass with religious motifs very similar to those found in Christian churches. Combined with political prisoners' testimonials, the stained-glass windows are meant to symbolically signify that resistance to prison hardships was only possible through a real belief in God.

The central point of this room is a four-section information stand (one section for Orthodox, one for Greek-Catholic, one for Roman Catholic, and one for the resistance to atheism). These four sections meet in a central circular piece which contains the Bible message: 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me' (Matthew 5:11). This teaching as a meeting point symbolically suggests that, beyond religious affiliations, resistance and salvation were possible through a belief in a universal and unifying God.

The following room – room 14 – tells the organizational and operational story of the most repressive tool of the Communist regime: 'The Security Police (Securitate⁹¹) between 1948 and 1989'. It was officially established by decree no. 221/30 of August 1948 with the declared purpose to 'defend democratic conquests and guarantee the safety of the People's Republic of Romania against enemies inside and outside the country'. A red stripe surrounding the top part of the room contains quotes which reveal the real goals and ideals of the Securitate: 'Discredit everything that functions well in the country!', 'Involve the leaders of the nation in illegal activities!', 'Undermine their reputations, force them into public disdain!', 'Spread discord among citizens!', 'Instigate the youth against the elderly!', 'Ridicule traditions!', 'We listen to the voices of the people only when they say what we want to hear!'. Photographs of executed Romanians, executions sites, and mass graves iconically signify the murderous nature of the Securitate, especially seen through the filter of Romanian archaic and religious beliefs discussed before, such as the

⁹¹ For additional information on the functioning of the Securitate: Adelman (1984), Deletant (1995, 1999, 2006), Oprea (2006, 2008b).

cycle of life and Christian love. Maps, documents, propaganda booklets, and portraits of the leaders of the Securitate iconically signify the carefully planned Soviet-backed development of the Securitate into a tool for national control and repression. The criteria for selection revolve around the wooden language previously discussed and include 'healthy social origins' and 'class hatred'. At its establishment, the Securitate had a good 'social composition' under Communist standards: 64% former workers, 4% peasants, 28% public functionaries, 2% with undisclosed origins, and 2% intellectuals. The profiles of the leaders of the Securitate reveal a trend: individuals of low education, trained in Moscow, who got promoted to key positions due to their servility and loyalty to the Communist Party. For example, Teohari Georgescu – Ministry of Internal Affairs between 1945 and 1952 and responsible for hundreds of thousands of arrested 'enemies of the people' – had only finished primary school and an apprenticeship before being trained by the Soviet NKVD secret services. Alexandru Drăghici - Ministry of Internal Affairs between 1952 and 1965 and responsible, according to historians, for 4-500,000 arrests – had only finished four years of primary school and had close connections to the Soviet-imposed agents. Three of the most sadistic leaders of sections of the Securitate were Mișu Dulgheru – had only finished six years of primary school, Alexandru Nicolschi – had finished eight years of primary school, and Tudor Sepeanu – had finished high-school before dedicating himself to the Communist Party. One document on display is a self-characterization of Vladimir Mazuru, who – having finished four years of primary school - was named in charge of one of the sections of the Securitate. He writes about himself in third person wooden language: 'Is devoted to the Party and the working class. Is disciplined. [...] Has comradely behavior; pays attention to the needs of the comrades.

[...] Is vigilant and tough with the enemies. [...] High political and ideological level, easily assimilates the Party's materials. [...] Is tireless at work. [...] Drives oneself based on healthy morals.'

A large panel displays tens of cases of prison sentences and what is clearly visible is the wooden language in formulating the reasoning. Most convictions are for 'plotting against the social order', 'instigation', 'plotting against the internal security', 'omission to denounce', 'publishing and spreading forbidden materials', 'internal activity against the working class and the revolutionary movement', 'organizing subversive gangs of fascist, paramilitary nature, plotting against the state', or 'organizing terrorist gangs'. By far the most frequent reason is 'plotting against the social order', and the prison convictions range from 7 to 25 years. In the same wooden language, most documents informing superiors about arrests begin with 'we are honored to inform you'. The actions, nature, and typical wooden language specific to the Communist regime in general and the Securitate in particular are clearly visible in the words of Teohari Georgescu, former chief of the Securitate and Ministry of Internal Affairs between 1945 and 1952: 'Between 6th March 1945 and 26th May 1952 our internal and external enemy has received innumerable blows. During these seven years, over 100,000 bandits have been arrested for plotting against our regime. This means hundreds of terrorist, diversionist, and espionage-focused organizations identified and crushed. The entire oppressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie, the secret service of information and the service of counter-information of the Army have been arrested. All identified legionary [fascist] elements who had key positions in the state, the legionary police, the former central and regional leaders of the bourgeois political parties, the leaders of the Armed Forces General Staff, prefects, senators,

deputies between 1920-1944, elements linked in the past to secret services of imperialist countries, leaders of those sects hostile to our regime, and other categories and elements with a hostile past have also been arrested. Neither of these could have been accomplished without class hatred. In times when the death sentence was inexistent, it was applied to those who tried to affect the interests of the working people'. The number of deaths remains unknown, as the Securitate would frequently fake death certificates or not write any at all. For example, a document on display shows how seven political prisoners who were supposed to be relocated to another penitentiary were shot in a forest. Their death certificates were written by the Securitate officers who executed them, who mentioned they had passed away because of tuberculosis or hypertension.

The central point of this room is a reconstruction of an interrogation room (Figure 18). The exterior walls display profiles of the toughest prison commanders, interrogators, and guards. For example, to obtain information about her husband – a member of an anti-Communist partisan group – interrogator Ioan Cârnu hanged Elisabeta Rizea by her hair on a hook in the ceiling. When he pushed the chair, the woman collapsed and her scalp remained on the ceiling. Then he beat her on her back with a rubber club. Because of the severe wounds, she was taken to the hospital where blood would burst anytime doctors tried giving her an injection. For ten days she could only rest on her knees and forehead. Cârnu also beat her in a private room of the hospital. Another example is Petrache Goiciu - the director of the Galați and Gherla Penitentiaries – who actively encouraged and executed atrocious tortures on prisoners. According to one statement, Goiciu and one subordinate once started violently beating a convict, then they inserted a broomstick in his mouth and hit it until it came out the other side of his head. There are tens of such

testimonials on display for members of the Securitate at different levels of authority. Visitors can look inside the reconstructed room through the peephole of a metal prison door. The scene inside is a reconstruction of an interrogation session: a desk, a phone, a typewriter, and a large lamp which was usually pointed at the eyes of the interrogated. Drawings on the walls depict different methods of torture, while a recording of a typing sound is meant to indexically add realism to the scene. The text underneath the peep hole enumerates the methods of torture used by the Securitate in the Communist prisons: beatings with wooden or rubber clubs over one's back; pulling of nails; pointing strong light to prisoners' eyes while forcefully keeping their eyes open; electric shocks; hitting or burning the soles of one's feet; putting burning cigarrets off on victims' scrotum or abdomen; hitting one's head with a club; hitting one's testicles with a heavy pencil; inserting a cat under the prisoner's shirt; hanging the prisoner upside down; hitting the prisoners with the tip of the boot over their mouths; forcing the prisoners to eat burning hot soup on their knees on the cell floor, with their hands behind their back; crucifying the convicts on the prison wall; hitting one's palms with a crevasse; crushing fingers with special pliers; hitting with sand bags; interrogation with German sheppard dogs; beatings with copper wires over the calves; beatings on open wounds; hitting the prisoners with clubs while they walk in a circle; forcing the prisoners to beat each other; isolation in a cold, humid and completely dark room; interrogations for days in a row with no break; feeding the prisoners very salty food without the ability to drink water; isolating the prisoners in extremely narrow rooms where they can only stand for days in a row; raping women; tying the prisoners by the bed frame in very uncomfortable positions; the inability to use the restroom for days in a row; simulating possible executions through shooting;

the interdiction to lie down; forcefully inserting the prisoners' head in the bowl with feces and urine; ingesting one's or other's feces or urine; forcing the starving victim to keep a piece of bread in his mouth without the ability to ingest it.



Figure 18 : Reconstruction of an Interrogation Room

Seen through the filter of the values and lifestyle promoted by the historical political parties, the Christian Church, and the Romanian archaic thought already discussed in this paper, the items displayed in this room iconically and indexically signify the repressive nature of the Securitate, while symbolically signifying the abrupt and atrocious nature of the Communist regime in Romania.

The next room – room 17 – presents the ‘Hard Labour’⁹², which involves the widespread use of political prisoners on building projects and in mines during the Communist regime.

One panel refers to the Danube – Black Sea Canal⁹³, a large-scale project which involved more than 60,000 workers in its initial stage. Most of them were ‘reactionary elements’, as this project was supposed to be – in the words of the official regime – ‘a grave of the bourgeoisie’. This narrative is iconically supported with photographs and documents. In 1953, realizing and trying to duck responsibility for the failure of this pharaonic project, the Communist authorities staged what became known as the ‘Trials of the Canal’ during which ten engineers were accused of the ‘crime of sabotaging the prosperity of the national economy’ and condemned to either death by execution or decades of hard labour. A different panel displays documents of the development and management of the Canal project. One of these documents talks about Decree no.6 issued on 14th January 1950 for the establishment of labor camps with the declared purpose of ‘re-educating hostile elements’. Those ‘hostile elements’ were those who attempted to jeopardize the regime of popular democracy, those who endanger the construction of Socialism, those who defame the authorities, and those condemned for offenses against state security. More precisely, the targeted categories were: those who launch or spread rumours; those who listen to foreign radio stations; those who insult the Party, the USSR,

⁹² Historical syntheses of the development of forced labor camps in Romania: Ciuceanu (2001), Banu (2008), Muraru (2008).

⁹³ On the development and living conditions at the Canal forced labor camp: Cesianu (1992), Cârja (1993), Jela (1995, 2006), Ionițoiu (2009), Stănescu (2012), Georgescu Topuslău (2011), Pavlovici (2012), Purcărea (2012), Ghica (2013), Hossu-Longin (2013), Stoica (2014).

the government, the leaders; those who have friendly relationships with foreign bodies, who visit foreign libraries, and who have friendly connections with the families of the employees of foreign bodies; those who instigate to disobedience; those who oppose collectivization; those with a 'reactionary past'; those engaged in religious proselytism; former 'exploiters'; those who sustain a 'hostile' correspondence. In 1952, an amendment added new categories to the list, with the purpose of 'isolating and re-educating certain hostile and parasitic elements': the members of interwar political parties; the members of the former secret services and police; 'the well-offs who sabotage the measures adopted by the government'; those condemned for attempting to illegally cross the border; and the families of those who had fled the country. These documents are flanked by two long double rows of names of political prisoners imprisoned in the colonies of forced labor across the Canal. Another document describes the treatment the political prisoners were subjected to: 'At the Canal, many convicts were beaten with crowbars, spades, shovels, crevasses with no justification, some of them dying because of the injuries and others becoming invalid for life. Other methods were also used: assassination through shooting; forbidding medical treatment to ill prisoners while forcing them to work; forcing prisoners to enter up to their waist in water at winter time in order to cut bog reed and bulrush; trampling the prisoners under horses; forcing prisoners to work on the dam naked in the middle of winter; burying prisoners alive; profaning prisoners' bodies after their demise'. These narratives are in stark contrast with the Romanians' Christian and archaic beliefs in the sanctity of life, Godly love, and compassionate behavior, and the need to respect everyone's cycle of life in its physical and metaphysical aspects.

As the penitentiaries were overflowing and the interest for the Canal was diminishing, the authorities decided to open three forced labor camps for political prisoners in Northern Romania, at Baia Sprie, Valea Nistrului, and Căvnic⁹⁴. These were mines for extraction of lead, where working conditions were harsh especially for malnourished prisoners. A quote by Ion Ioanid – one of the most well-known narrators of prisoners' life – reads: 'It was hard to estimate where the chances of resisting and staying alive were the highest: starving in a prison cell or exhausting your last drop of energy working to extermination in the mines'. The convicts were working at different depths underground – the deepest ones reaching temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius - and were always coerced to exceed their daily quotas. Another quote on display depicts the working conditions in the lead mines: 'The temperature was dry. The temperature: 42 degrees! Because of the lack of oxygen, we were blowing like locomotives. The sweat was pouring down, and we felt exhausted without doing any work. In such conditions, I worked for more than a week. I was working in my underwear or just with a string around my waist onto which I hanged a cloth, and with bare feet inside rubber boots. Within a few days, the soles on my feet would wrinkle, whiten, and macerate. Because of the extraordinary dehydration, we drank unimaginable amounts of water. The shaft was not wider than one meter, and its height forced us always to bend over. The first thing I had to get used to was the miner's typical walk, with bent knees, rounded shoulders, and head down'.

⁹⁴ On the development and living conditions of political prisoners in the lead mines of Romania: Grebnea (1997), Brânzăș (2001), Kondrat (2008), Uglea (2008), Ioanid (2013), Lucacel & Crișan (2013).

Besides working on large construction sites and in the lead mines, political prisoners were also used in factories developed inside the penitentiaries. For example, former engineers meanwhile imprisoned at the Aiud Penitentiary were asked to develop machines for different technological branches. A fantasist order they received from the General Direction of Penitentiaries was to design and develop a motorcycle. The last original motorcycle developed by political prisoners at the Aiud Penitentiary is displayed in the center of this room, indexically adding materiality to the narrative of forced labor in Romanian Communist prisons (Figure 19). Instances of escapes from forced labor camps and examples of consciously choosing death over life in prison gain meaning and explanation when seen through the filter of the fundamental value of Christianity: freedom.



Figure 19 : Motorcycle Built by Political Prisoners at the Aiud Penitentiary

This room also introduces another major societal drama of the Romanian gulag: the forced deportation of tens of thousands of Romanians from their lands to the Bărăgan plains of South-Eastern Romania. On 18th June 1951, thousands of families from Western Romania were loaded on trains and deported. They only allowed to carry basic items, and they were unloaded in an empty field where they had to start life all over again by building huts and cultivating small patches of land in complete isolation. Some Romanians of German origins had already been deported to the Donbas region of the USSR. Considering the importance of one's house and land in the Romanian archaic through already discussed, this display – supported by photographs - iconically sends strong messages of individual and national, physical and metaphysical uprootal.

A satellite image of South-Eastern Romania dotted with the main forced labor camps for the Danube – Black Sea Canal, the obligatory domiciles of the deportees, execution sites, and mass graves iconically signified the magnitude and diversity of the Communist repression in Romania.

Moving on, room 18 talks about 'Collectivization'⁹⁵. Resistance and repression', which refers to the forceful transfer of private agricultural land to state control. Initially, this focused on the confiscation of lands and possessions of the deportees. Following the agrarian reform in 1949, the Communist authorities introduced a system of 'obligatory quotas' which required peasants to hand over large shares of their harvests to the state.

⁹⁵ A fundamental work on the process of collectivization in Romania during the Communist regime is: Kligman, G., & Verdery, K. (2011). *Peasants under siege: the collectivization of Romanian agriculture, 1949-1962*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Other works of synthesis include: Dobeş, Bârlea, & Fürtös (2004), Dobrinu & Iordachi (2005), Dobrinu (2006), Borşa (2009), Roman (2009).

Those who rejected the quotas were considered ‘saboteurs’ and arrested. To facilitate this societal shift, the authorities decided to implement Soviet-style collectivization and divide the peasantry – in the spirit of ‘class warfare’ – into three categories: ‘poor’, ‘middling’, and ‘wealthy’. To combat the ‘middling’ and ‘wealthy’, the poor had to be enlightened as to the benefits of joining the agricultural holdings. Over the following years, an intense campaign of indoctrination (through activists) and coercion (through repressive forces) was implemented. These were frequently met with open hostility by the peasants, which translated in revolts and clashes with the militia and Securitate forces. Tens of uprisings led to hundreds of thousands of arrested, wounded, dead or deported. For example, according to the data released by the Party, these clashes led to more than 800,000 arrested peasants between 1949 and 1952. In April 1962, the completion of the collectivization was proclaimed: 96% of the country’s arable surface and 3,201,000 families had been incorporated into collectivist structures.

Upon their entrance in room 18, visitors are taken aback by the image of an evergreen clod of earth placed in the middle of the room (Figure 20). This item symbolically signifies the sacred nature of land in the perception of a historically agricultural Romanian nation, as already discussed in this paper. In archaic Romanian thought, the land is fundamentally linked to one’s freedom and is the safe keeper of physical and metaphysical roots. It supports the entire life of the living and is the final resting place of the deceased, thus being intimately connected to one’s full cycle of life. On the wall behind this clod there is a large map of Romania onto which tens of places of resistance, of uprising against collectivization are marked. This is iconically linked to the Christian concept of sacrificing oneself for freedom and truth. To the right of the map, an

original hayfork and scythe are displayed. These are among the most widespread items in Romanian peasant households. In their banality across families, regions, and centuries, the hayfork and scythe on display symbolically signify the Romanian agricultural tradition in itself. In the days of uprising against collectivization, the hayfork and scythe became weapons the peasants used to fight the repressive forces and chase away Communist activists. Through this filter, the changing function of the two items (from traditional agricultural to belligerent) symbolically signifies the rupture of tradition caused by the instauration of the Communist regime, the violent existential shift from existence to subsistence, from peaceful and constructive communion to a destructive insurgent mindset.



Figure 20 : Evergreen Clod of Earth

As visitors face the map of resistance, the wall to the left displays large photos of Romanian peasants during the years of collectivization. These photos iconically send strong identitarian messages to visitors from a historically agrarian Romanian society where the peasants are perceived as the safe keepers of material and immaterial tradition. The photos are displayed alongside documents of collectivization, such as a peasant's handbook of obligatory quotas, or deportation papers for entire families. Also on display is a case study of 16 pages of the detailed inventory of possessions confiscated from a peasant following his and his family's deportation to the Bărăgan plains. The documents mentioned that all of his mobile and immobile possessions were to be confiscated, and these possessions range from the house and land to 'women's pink and blue underwear', diapers for children, and a loaf of bread. Considering the strong meanings given to the house, land, and family by Romanians – as already mentioned – the photos of suffering families of peasants and the documents of coercive collectivization iconically signify the repressive and invasive nature of the Communist regime in Romania. The panel on the opposite wall follows the same narrative pattern, but the large photos of peasants in traditional Romanian outfits are mixed with documents of arrest and execution of participants in uprisings against collectivization. These items iconically reinforce the narrative of the violent fracture of tradition brought about by the Communist regime, and resistance to Sovietization.

This semiotic structure of the clod of evergreen earth, the map of resistance, the hayfork and scythe, photos of peasants, and documents of forced collectivization draws upon essential existential aspects of a preponderantly agricultural and Orthodox society

to iconically and symbolically send messages of resistance to oppression in the name of tradition, freedom, and truth.

Room 19 tells the story of ‘1948: the Sovietization of Romania’, more precisely of the restructuring of the entire Romanian lifestyle - social, cultural, political, technological, judicial, educational, and so on – according to the Soviet model. As visitors enter the room, the wall facing them talks about the brutal change in the property rights, the aggressive implementation of Communist norms and values, the declaration of class hatred as the supreme principle of life, the complete reversal of moral hierarchies, and the systematic destruction of the archaic lifestyle. To iconically back this up, directives of the NKVD (the repressive secret militia of the USSR) to the governments in the USSR sphere of influence are quoted. For example: the implementation of a single-party system where key roles are held by Soviet agents, the boycotting and manipulation of private property so that nationalization and collectivization become necessities; instilling hatred towards religion and Church, while closely surveilling religious ceremonies such as weddings or funerals; eliminating valuable and popular educators from educational institutions at all levels, while replacing them with loyal Party members of low education; removing philosophy and logic from school curriculum; when presenting the history of the monarchy in Romania, focus should be placed on the greed and malice of the monarchs and on the struggles of the working class; organizing artistic events where the fight of locals against invaders is presented; or imprisoning the leaders of the political opposition and eliminating them in ‘unpredictable situations’. Flanking and adding weight to this information are two tall rows of text quoting the entire Law 119 from 11th June 1948 for the nationalization of all industrial, banking, mining, insurance, and transportation

ventures. The adjoining walls display different items – mostly front pages of the ‘Scântea’ official Party newspaper – to iconically signify other societal changes inflicted by the 1948 Sovietization of Romania. In 1948, ‘Comrade’ replaced ‘Mr’ and became the obligatory form of address in institutions, and employees were required to join unions and the ALRUS (the Romanian Association for Links with the Soviet Union). The ‘single party of the working class’ was established, and a new Constitution was issued on 13th April 1948. Article 2 of this Constitution states – in the typical wooden language already mentioned – that ‘the Popular Republic of Romania came into being through the people’s struggle – led into battle by the working class – against fascism, reactionarism, and imperialism’. The wooden language focused on class hatred is omnipresent in the ‘Scântea’ articles on display. For example, when talking about the group of anti-Communist partisans recently caught in the Banat Mountains, an article in ‘Scântea’ reads: ‘They fully deserved the hatred of the class enemy. There can be no greater honor for a Communist than being hated by his enemies: it means he is fulfilling his duty to the people, to the nation, to the Party. [...] Any of their abject plots is helpless against the strength of the State of the working class, the unflinching force of the proletarian dictatorship whose iron fist crushes all bloodthirsty bandits like worms. All over the country, in cities and villages, the boiling-with-anger-voice of the working class rises like an enormous wave in the name of life, freedom, and justice, and asks for the DEATH SENTENCE [original capitalization] for the murderers of the brothers-in-arms, for the bandits who, working for the imperialists, dared to raise their killing hands at the working people and the State organs’. The title of a similar article reads, in large font: ‘No mercy for the traitors of the nation and the enemies of the working people! – Workers,

technicians, and engineers in factories call for the tough sentencing of the gang of plotters, spies, and saboteurs working for American imperialism'. To announce the nationalization, 'Scântea' writes on the front page: 'The factories were pulled out of the greedy hands of exploiters and have become the shared good of the entire nation'. The wooden language is also used for praising the USSR. Among portraits of Stalin, hammers and sickles, and photos of large parades, titles in 'Scântea' read, for example: 'Long live the Soviet Union who tailored and showed all nations the path to Socialism!', 'The Stalinist constitution...the conscience of the world!', or 'May forever live the friendship between the Romanian people and nations of the Soviet Union, - the security for the independence and flourishing of our nation'.

The changes in the arts inflicted by the Sovietization of Romania are iconically signified through a displayed 'Scântea' article titled 'The Putrefaction of Poetry or the Poetry of Putrefaction', where the authorities are criticizing the artistry of Tudor Arghezi – one of the leading poets of Romania. Emphasized paragraphs read: 'The obscenities of the gutters have nothing in common with the language of the peasant. They cannot be liked by the hating working class [...] Here we have poetry in a pathetic role of a watchdog for capitalist profits. [...] There is no art for the sake of art. Art must always and for any artist have a class-driven ideological character. [...] What a pity – you tell yourself reading these lines – that such a beautiful image is lost in the ideological mud of the decadent bourgeoisie, a mud meant to be trampled by the victorious nation in their march towards light and life.' Iconically supporting this message of cultural, historical, and political uprootal through repression is a document listing some of the writings forbidden by the Communist regime. This list includes the writings of King Carol I, Queen Elizabeth, and

Queen Mary of Romania – three of the most respected political figures in Romanian history, of former leaders of the historical political parties, and important historical writings on the Romanians' resistance against invaders in Transylvania and Bessarabia. The writings of the most illustrious historians of Romania – Ion Nistor and Nicoae Iorga, and, most importantly, those of Mihai Eminescu – known as the national poet of Romania – are included on this list.

A document on display iconically signifies other important societal changes imposed by the Communist regime. A new official calendar replaced the traditional archaic and Christian public holidays with holidays such as 'the Day of the Soviet Army and the Military Fleet of the USSR' (23rd February), 'the Birthday of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin' (22nd April), 'the Day of the Workers' International Solidarity' (1st May), 'the Birthday of the Communist Party of Romania' (8th May), 'the Day of the Liberation of the Romanian Nation from underneath the Fascist Oxbow' (23rd August), or 'the Birthday of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin' (21st December). Considering Romania is a nation where most public holidays have deep religious and mythological meanings, displaying this imposed official Soviet-style calendar iconically signifies a severe rupture of tradition. This feeling is reinforced by mentioning the replacement of the most enduring national anthem of Romania with one titled 'Crushed Shackles', whose approximate translation reads: 'Broken chains are left behind, / The worker is always in the front / Through struggle and sacrifice a step we climb / The people are masters of their destiny. / Long live, long live our Republic! / In a march of a tempestuous torrent / We, workers and peasants and soldiers, /Are building the Romania of the new Republic. / Eliminating the old putrid dam / It is the hour of holy suspense / Union and peace and work are carrying

the flag / Of the new Popular Republic. / Long live, long live our Republic! / In a march of a tempestuous torrent / We, workers and peasants and soldiers, Are building the Romania of the new Republic.' Also displayed are slogans which, through intense repetition, have become leitmotifs of existence in Soviet Romania, such as: 'Stalin and the Russian people / Have provided us with freedom!', 'We will work and we will fight / to strengthen the Republic!', or 'Beloved Central Committee / by the people forever praised!'.

Other changes iconically signifying a rupture of societal fabric include replacing any religious icons with portraits of members of the Workers' Party secretariat, replacing the leaders of all religious denominations with loyal ones and completely banning the Greek-Catholic Church, and purging the Romanian Academy by replacing its members with Communist loyalists.

With the disclosed purpose of emphasizing the moral, educational, and linguistic differences between pre-Communist and Communist Romania, museum curators display excerpts from the diaries of three illustrious intellectual figures: Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Alice Voinescu, and Mărgărita Vulcănescu. One entry in the diary of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru reads: 'I started with the belief that Romania is the Eastern sentinel of European civilization and today I end in the middle of numerous terrorized Romanians, who are coerced to feel their country is the Western sentinel of Muscovite civilization. What a sad old age has God bestowed upon me!' Other chronological entries in his 1948 diary read: 'It was an open coup d'état. [...] The Russification of Romania is realized at a fast tempo. [...] The Soviet institutional methods are being copied just like the Western

European ones used to be copied. And the population is passive, with no reaction. The population is terrorized. [...] The Russian occupation does not limit itself to imposing political and economic obligations to Romania but also expects a cultural servitude. Under the pretext of establishing a real popular democracy, the Russian occupation aims for the elimination of all individual acts of creation nature has bestowed upon the Romanian genius, acts of creation who are incompatible with the pattern of Communist ideology. [...] The farmer who is not selling his products at a price fixed by the State is trialed for sabotage and forced to pay heavy fines. [...] The Romanian Academy is being dissolved and transformed into an instrument of Soviet propaganda. I can no longer have an intellectual life for the Romanian culture due to censorship. Relationships with friends and former colleagues are becoming harder and harder, as most of them are close to starvation and are dedicating their time to obtaining food from one day to the next.’ Similar entries are found in the 1948 diary of Alice Voinescu: ‘[...] I cannot sleep. Although very calm in my conscience, my blood pressure has probably risen because of the news of myself, Jora, Maximilian and five other professors being removed from office. They have been probably keeping an eye on me for a long time. [...] Communism is developing a hate-based culture. Class hatred is its basis. [...] It is Easter Sunday: the saddest, as it is the most non-Christian I have ever lived. Today, a great manifestation – in the streets, thousands of people driven by fear and worrying about tomorrow. [...] It has been a long time since I felt the end of times so close. I am scared of mass deportations – of the liquidation of the cult layer of society. [...] I try to understand their positive drive for just social order. But whenever I read or hear their words, this is a negative drive – the need for destruction is stronger than the need for construction. Not even the famous

enthusiasm for the USSR does not sound real. It is just a cover-up formula and a slogan imposed by fear and interest. [...] A dirty city – the society is ever more closed and concerned. Anxiety is floating in the air. I do not even know how I would react to freedom anymore. Can we still recognize it? In our prayers to God there is a sense of sad helplessness. I wish it were a positive outburst. Now there is only the experience of complete helplessness'. Talking about her experience in the Carmen Sylva high-school in Bucharest, the notes from Mărgărita Vulcănescu's diary read: 'Syndicate meeting at school (the >> comrade << concept is introduced) [...] Busy schedule at school – preparing the coursework, everything on a >> dialectical-materialist << pattern. [...] In the afternoon we had to pledge allegiance. In front of the new director, without a cross or a priest, without any faith, and I will not even mention a soul. Then the syndicate meeting. New portraits on the walls. [...] The celebration of the Great Union. It unavoidably starts with >> The Internationale <<. [...] At 3.30 we leave in a group to join the supporters greeting the government returning from Moscow. >> The herd << must walk in the middle of the street. [...] Today is less cold than yesterday. Luckily we still have wood for the fire. The restroom is an ice factory. Will these years ever pass? It seems forever, but I must not say it out loud, as we must not lose hope. [...] The 26 educators who have already joined the party were given the mission to >> process << and >> indoctrinate << us, the 23 who have not yet joined. [...] At school we are told that from now on we have to keep watch, two by two, for >> reactionary << elements. [...] Then a gentleman, I mean to say a >> comrade << spoke. Everything was organized and directed way too obviously. At some >> magical << words of the speaker, a shout was heard in the corner of the room, followed by ovations and applause. [...] The priest of the Stavropoleos Church was arrested inside

the Church before this morning's mass. It seems he spoke against the present-day politics on election day.' In their intimacy, these accounts iconically signify the intense personal dramas lived by certain categories due to the perceived reversal in moral and societal norms brought by the Sovietization of Romania.

The following room – room 20 – is labelled 'Communism versus the Monarchy' and continues the story of the Sovietization of Romania by depicting the final years of the reign of King Michael I (Figure 21). At the time of the coup d'état on 23rd August 1944 which led to the de facto occupation of the country by the Red Army, the monarchy in Romania was very popular and was seen as the last stronghold against communization. Displayed images of the King and Queen's internal and external visits iconically signify the large popularity of the royal family among Romanians. Familial portraits, but also photos of the royal family close to farmers and traditions, or those of the King and Queen attending religious or cultural events iconically signify the reason for their popularity: their close connection to and appreciation of the fundamental pillars of Romanian lifestyle already discussed (Christianity, family, land, heritage), as well as their patronage of intellectuality and the arts. These photos come into stark contrast with others depicting the King side by side with Romanian and Russian Communist authorities in events which finally led to the coup d'état. Thus, placing these photos side by side iconically signifies the illegitimate seizure of power by the Communists, while symbolically signifying the abrupt rupture of the thread of Romanian tradition and continuity, and the sudden reversal of societal norms and values.



Figure 21 : King Michael I of Romania

Iconically adding international recognition to the King's national one are two decrees signed by Harry Truman (former president of the USA) and Mikhail Kalinin (former leader of the USSR) for decorating King Michael for his contribution towards defeating Nazi Germany and ending World War II. Again, these documents are contrasted by others closely linked to the coup d'état. For example, one panel displays the letter and memorandum sent by King Michael I to Franklin Roosevelt (the president of the USA) to explain the tough situation in Romania after the coup on 23rd August 1944 and seek support. Next to them, visitors can see the telegram sent by the US State Department to the US mission in Romania announcing their decision to not reply to King Michael's letter

to President Roosevelt. The telegram reads: ‘It is not deemed advisable to make a formal reply to the King’s letter, particularly given the tone and contents of the accompanying memorandum, at a time when we are seeking to reach a common ground with the Soviet Government in dealing with the Romanian situation’. The opposite wall displays the signed confirmation of King Michael’s abdication on 30th December 1947. This document iconically signifies the complete seizure of power by the Communist Party, while symbolically signifying the breaking point between old traditional Romania and the new Soviet one. Following the King’s abdication, all the members of the royal family were stripped of their citizenship and had to go into exile, as an official 1948-document on display shows. Next to it lies another document from 1997 revoking this 1948-decision. Displaying these two documents next to each other iconically signifies an attempted knotting of the broken thread of social, cultural, and political continuity.

The following room – room 21 – is labeled ‘The communization of the army, police, and justice system’. These had been apolitical institutions until the outbreak of the World War II. Their employees were banned from getting involved in politics, from voting or being elected. In their goal of seizing complete power, the pro-Soviet authorities began a campaign of purging those who had been involved in the previous regime. To support their subsequent actions, they first sovietized the judicial system, as one panel in this room reveals. Their actions included: modifying the Constitution, purging thousands of judges, establishing the ‘people’s tribunals’ and a Soviet-style military magistracy with complete competence over political trials, assigning puppet defenders for political trials, replacing professional with unprofessional and uneducated assessors, and introducing punishments for imaginary actions in the penal code. One method for replacing the former

judges was establishing judicial schools where loyalists who had only finished 4-7 years of primary school were trained on how to deliver justice to the ‘bourgeois leftovers’, ‘enemies of the people’, ‘spies and traitors’, or ‘instruments of imperialism’. The party line on justice is drawn by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (the Stalinist leader of Romania between 1947 and 1965) in a displayed quote: ‘I propose we put an end to such trials. They should be closed trials, not open. We can more or less write about some of them according to their importance. They all deserve, based on the laws of our Republic, to be shot. But, as they are too many and it may look like a butcher’s house, we must sentence them to prison and only in exceptional situations, 2-3 cases, sentence them to death’.

One section details the communization of the police, secret services, and gendarmerie under the Soviet military pressure and under the pretext of ‘clearing the remains of Fascism’ and ‘democratization’. On the night of 26-27 July 1948, thousands of purged police officers, gendarmes, and members of the royal secret service were arrested. They were imprisoned at penitentiaries across the nation, but one prison in particular was dedicated to them: the Făgăraș Prison. Built in 1310, the Făgăraș Fortress⁹⁶ is one of the most enduring architectural icons of Romania and has been involved in vital historical moments for defending the territorial and cultural integrity of the Romanian nation. During the Communist regime, approximately 160 political prisoners passed away in the fortress turned into a prison. The image of the Făgăraș Fortress transformed from a national cultural and defensive institution and a safe keeper of Romanian centuries-old

⁹⁶ On the history of the Făgăraș Fortress: Giurescu & Giurescu (1971), Suci (2013).

history into one for repressing the nation's elites iconically signifies the violent rupture of the thread of history and the reversal of societal values brought by the Communist regime.

New institutions were established – such as the Popular Militia and the Securitate – where new cadres were recruited from the gutters of society, those of limited education, semi-illiterate who could easily be trained on the principle of class hatred. Compared to the Royal Police whose employees had graduate or postgraduate degrees in Law, only 161 (out of 35,000) employees of the Popular Militia had a university degree, and 9,600 had not even finished four years of primary school. The gendarmerie was turned from an elite military institution into one for repressing anti-Communist partisan movements and uprisings, and for completing the mass deportations.

The pledge of allegiance of militaries was amended to include: 'I vow to hate all the enemies of the nation and of the working people from the bottom of my being'. One displayed poem about the Securitate translates: 'They were feeling anxious / With the righteous and sacred hatred, / They were seeking righteous punishment / According to the law and actions'. The royal military uniforms were replaced with Soviet-style ones, while the military songs and anthems were substituted with those praising the USSR, Stalin, and the Communists. Civilian Communist loyalists were given power over people and structures of long-standing military tradition.

Similar actions were taken for the communization of the Romanian Army, one of the most respected institutions among Romanians. Labeled 'fascists' *en masse*, the Army was infiltrated with political commissars – in Russian 'politruk' – at all levels, responsible

with the political education of the cadres and committed to the civilian control of the military. The elites of the Army were replaced with loyalists who had only finished a few years of primary school. Those activists who proved themselves useful to the Party were directly given the military rank of general. One of the first missions of the communized Army was the direct involvement in the manipulation of the 1946 elections, when officers, sub-officers, and soldiers were had specific tasks of suppressing or arresting members of the opposition, cover up the replacement of voting urns or insert fake voting bulletins favoring the Socialists. One section is dedicated to the extermination of Army generals in the Communist prisons. These generals had been leading the Romanian Army into the battles of the World Wars, thus having fundamental roles in the safekeeping of territorial boundaries and historical continuity. Linking these national heroic figures to their fate during the Communist regime symbolically signifies the dramatic shift in the national destiny and its system of values.

Many of these Army leaders were arrested and eventually exterminated because of openly displaying their opposition to the sovietisation of the armed forces. Some chose to start groups of armed anti-Communist resistance in the Carpathian Mountains. After years of fighting against the repressive forces, they were eventually caught and executed. Upon his execution, Major Nicolae Dabija shouted ‘Long live Romania!’, while the leader of his execution squad said: ‘Comrades, we have fulfilled our duty to the working class!’. The displayed portraits of Army leaders who chose to fight and eventually perish rather than accept the sovietisation of Romania symbolically mirrors and gains meaning through the sacrificial crucifixion of Christ for mankind’s truth, freedom, and salvation.

Moving forward, room 22 tells the story of ‘Bessarabia in the Gulag⁹⁷’. A historically Romanian province, Bessarabia was part of the Russian Empire for 106 years until reunited with Romania in 1916. It became a Soviet territory again in 1940, following the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. The text of this pact is displayed in original Russian and translated Romanian languages on a panel in room 22. A map of Romania where the territory of Bessarabia is emphasized in a different color than the rest of the territory iconically signifies the tearing of what is colloquially known as Large Romania. Bessarabia was liberated by the Romanian forces in 1941, only to be annexed again by the Soviet Union in 1944 and transformed into the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. The effects of this final occupation are iconically signified through a magnitude of displayed photographs and documents depicting deportations of Romanians to Siberia or Kazakhstan, mass executions, the extermination of the political, intellectual, and spiritual elites, forced collectivization and industrializations of villages, and the systematic Russification through the relocation of Russians into Bessarabia and the forced implementation of Cyrillic writing and Russian language as official means of communication (Figure 22). One panel presents portraits of individuals who took action against the Russification of Bessarabia, for example by flying the Romanian flag on the building of Soviet-imposed authorities, which ultimately led to their execution or deportation to the Siberian Gulag. In total, approximately 300,000 Romanians were deported to Siberia, many of whom never returned. Photos depicting whole families,

⁹⁷ On the deportations of Romanians from Bessarabia to the Siberian gulag: Gribincea (1995), Saka (1995), Şişcanu (1998), Caşu (2006, 2010), Nandriş-Cudla (2013).

clergy, farmers being deported to Siberia, and other photos of families burying their relatives in improvised graves thousands of kilometers away from their country iconically signify the individual and collective dramas inflicted by the forced occupation of Romania by the USSR. This dramatism is amplified when the displayed items are seen through the filter of the aforementioned pillars of Romanian thought: the sacred nature of the national land, the sanctity of one's cycle of life, the mythological rites of passage and burial, and the Christian expectation of treating others and being treated with love and compassion. The loss of Bessarabia is colloquially and passionately perceived by Romanians as a never-healing national wound, so the narrative on display is presumed to awake intense emotional reactions within visitors.



Figure 22 : Romanians in Siberia

The following room – room 23 – is labelled ‘The countries of Eastern Europe (1945-1989)’ and depicts the establishment and evolution of Communist regime in the other seven satellite nations of the USSR which, together with Romania, formed what came to be known as the ‘Eastern European Communist bloc’: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland, and the German Democratic Republic. An individual panel for each of them uses chronologies, photos, and documents to reveal a pattern of establishment, focused on: the Stalinist terror; key moments of the complete seizure of power by Communist movements such as Berlin (1953), Budapest (1956), or Prague (1968); instances of active acts of resistance to Communization such as the demise through self-immolation of the Czech student Jan Palach in the centre of Prague on 18th January 1969; and the events leading to the fall of all of these Communist regimes in 1989⁹⁸. The narrative and items on display symbolically signify the shared and international nature of the suffering caused by Communist regimes and of the resistance to them.

Connected rooms 25-26 exhibit ‘A Chronology of the Cold War’. The second half of the twentieth century was dominated by the constant unbearable level of tension of the Cold War. This materialized in millions of deaths caused by local wars, organized massacres, in prisons and forced labor camps. From 1945, Communist movements seized power in two-thirds of Europe, most of Asia and large sections of Africa. Large panels

⁹⁸ An important historical work on the events which led to the fall of Communist regimes across Europe in 1989: Burakowski, Gubrynowicz, & Ukielski (2013). Other similar works include: Lévesque (1997), De Nevers (2003), Engel (2009), Pleshakov (2009), Sebestyen (2009).

depict the chronology of the Cold War from 1945 to 1989. This chronology is iconically backed up with separate panels portraying important events of the Cold War. Some of them reinforce the struggles against Communism in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and divided Berlin already discussed in the previous room. Iconically adding gravity and depth to this struggle is a displayed panel of internationally-accepted estimated victims of Communist regimes around the world: Soviet Union (20 million), China (65 million), Vietnam (1 million), North Korea (2 million), Cambodia (2 million), Eastern Europe (1 million), Latin America (150,000), Africa (1.7 million), Afghanistan (1.5 million). Other panels display the reasons behind the rising tensions between the US and the USSR. In the aftermath of the World War II, the USSR had tremendously increased their sphere of influence. A quote of Stalin addressing Tito (the leader of Yugoslavia) reads: 'This war is not like any other in the past; he who occupies a country now imposes his own social system as far as his armies have advanced'. Quotes belonging to President Truman and other US authorities reveal their view: 'Up to now, our accords with the USSR have been a one-way street, and this cannot go on: it is now or never', and 'Washington will not allow violation of the UN Charter'. The rising tension between the two is iconically signified by photos and documents on the Cuban missile crisis and the nuclear arms race. Although the two did not battle each other, the tension between them led to tragic conflicts in other parts of the world, as iconically signified by other panels on display. For example, the Korean War (1950-1953) between the Communist North and the US-backed South led to approximately 2.5 million casualties. Similarly, the Vietnam War (1954-1975) between the Communist North and the US-backed South resulted in 4 million deaths. Other mentioned conflicts are the Israeli-Palestinians Wars, the War in Afghanistan

(1979-1988), and the Iraq-Iran Wars. The assassination of President Kennedy and the attempted assassinations of Pope John Paul II and President Reagan are also displayed. These events are iconically signified by graphic images. The entire back wall is covered with 31 portraits of figures who played significant roles during the Cold War (Figure 23).



Figure 23 : Important Figures of the Cold War

The items on display in connected rooms 25-26 iconically signify the tragic conflicts of the Cold War. Also, if the previous room was placing the Romanians' struggle against Communism in a similar European context, the narrative on display in rooms 25-26 further internationalize this struggle by iconically placing it in the world context of the times.

Room 37 called 'Black' is the starting point for visiting the first floor of the museum (Figure 24). Each Communist prison had a punishment room where political prisoners seen as recalcitrant were isolated in complete darkness, chained down to a ring in the middle of the cell by heavy hand and leg cuffs. Prisoners were sent to the 'Black' cell barefoot, and sometimes their legs were tied to a grill under water, while their food allowance was halved. Room 37 displays the cuffs in the center of the room and recreates the pitch darkness experience of prisoners. In so doing, it indexically signifies the harsh imprisonment of political prisoners, especially considering most of those locked up at the Sighet Prison were senior citizens. When linked to the aforementioned Christian belief in light as creation and life, the complete darkness of this room and the chains symbolically signify the destructive and morbid nature of the Communist regime in Romania.

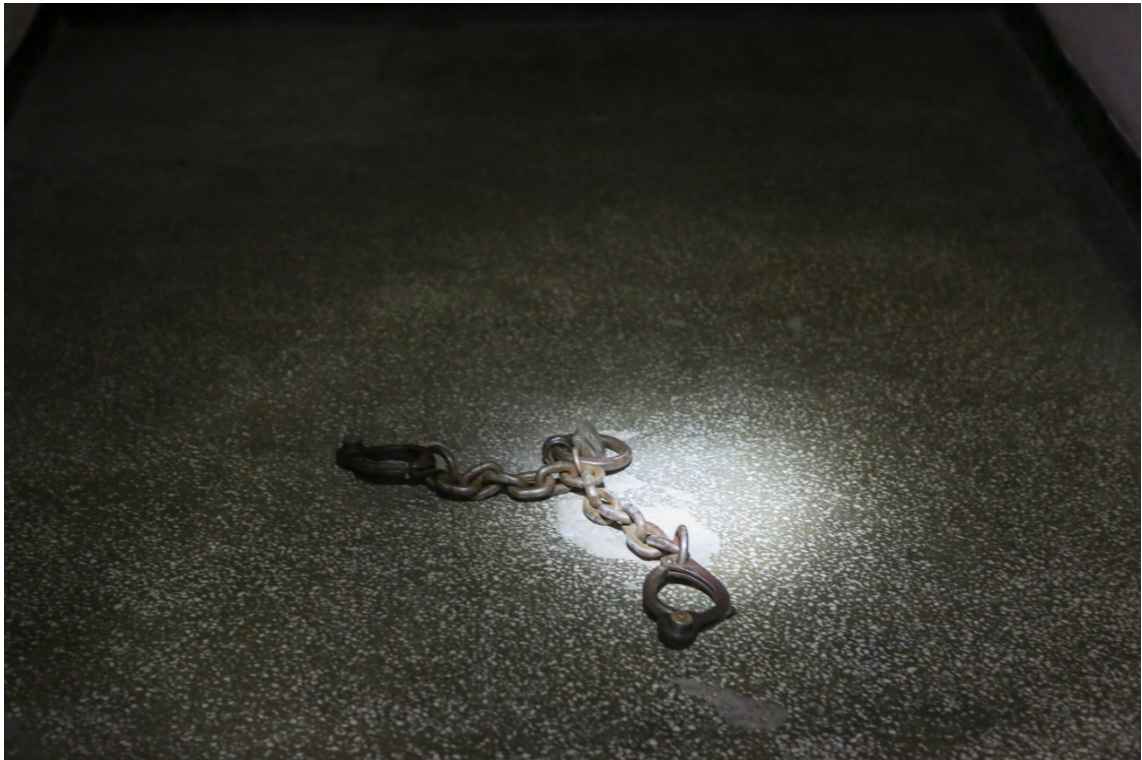


Figure 24 : The 'Black' Punishment Cell

Room 38 is labeled ‘Dignitaries’ and is dedicated to the political elite who was exterminated at the Sighet Penitentiary. As already mentioned, in their attempt to wipe out any possible opposition, the Communist authorities used the Sighet Prison for imprisoning the interwar political (the leaders of the historical political parties) and spiritual (Greek and Roman Catholic) elite of Romania. Many of them had been actively involved in the Great Union of Romania and the developmental boom of the country between the World Wars. A displayed list of the 54 political prisoners who succumbed in the Sighet Prison is flanked by the photos and profiles of Vasile Ciolpan (the director of the prison between 1950 and 1955) and Alexandru Satmari (the Securitate political commissar). Individual portraits for each of these 54 convicts fill up the walls of room 38. Through the filter of Christian beliefs in justice and archaic rituals of commemoration, displaying the two representatives of the Communist regime next to the list of 54 deceased members of the Romanian elite symbolically calls for both a moral and judicial retribution of the perpetrators, and for the solemn commemoration and remembrance of the victims. It is also the place where the victims and perpetrators, and the pre-Communist and Communist Romania symbolically face each other in nature and actions.

As they advance through the museum, visitors enter room 39 – ‘The communization of education’ (Figure 25). The goal of the Communist regime of Romania – typical for any totalitarian state - was to create a ‘new man’, a depersonalized and loyal entity devoid of any past and looking only to a Party-centred ‘luminous future’. As a bridge across generations, education was key to inflicting the rupture between old and new Romania. As a displayed document mentions, four percent of the political prisoners during the Communist regime were teachers and professors. A panel quotes the Party

politics for the destruction of the educational elites and for promoting loyalist cadres. A 1947-NKVD directive to the satellite nations states: 'Valuable and popular educators should be removed from primary schools, professional schools, and especially from high-schools and universities. They should be replaced by our people, with a low or mediocre educational and professional level'. In 1948, the Minister of Education announced the goal of the upcoming educational reform: 'We need to create in our country a new intelligentsia from among the working class, the peasantry, and the progressive intelligentsia'. According to a decision of the Ministry of Education in 1947, 30 percent of the candidates for medical faculties and 20 percent of the candidates for the other superior educational institutions were to be exclusively selected from workers' and peasants' families owning less than 3 hectares of land. In 1949-1950, the Ministry of Education further limited the access to superior education for 'heirs of exploitive elements'. A directive in 1952 argued that tougher measures are 'necessary for the improvement of the class composition of pupils and students'.

For the Communists, the educator was an instrument of the Party and the 'sculptor of the Soviet man'. Among the first decrees for purging educators – labelled decrees for 'the purification of public administration' and for 'the rationalization of the educational system' – led to the elimination from the system of eminent professors, such as Gheorghe Brătianu, Dumitru Caracostea, Ion Petrovici, Sextil Pușcariu, Onisifor Ghibu, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Constantin C. Giurescu, Istrate Micescu, and many others. The Educational Law passed on 3rd August 1948 states: 'The existing faculties and institutions for superior education shall be restructured according to this law. To meet this goal, useless sections [disciplines] will be abolished, others will be rationalized according to

necessities, and new ones will be established'. It further states: 'Reactionary elements must be surveilled with high vigilance and it must be pondered whether their activity's political effect is not more harmful than the benefits they bring in their professional field, as to decide upon their replacement'. According to a decree from 17th November 1953, the objectives of superior educational institutions are: 'the training of superior cadres for the learning of scientific Socialism, ready at all times to defend the motherland, devoted to the cause of building Socialism and defending peace', 'the ideological and political education of students and educators', and 'the popularization of scientific and technical knowledge, as well as the promotion of all scientific and technical accomplishments, based on the experience of Stakhanovites⁹⁹ and innovators in the USSR and the People's Republic of Romania'.

These Communist reformist measures are iconically contrasted by displayed profiles of those affected by them. The interwar period saw an unprecedented flourishing of education and research, as bright researchers and professors returned to Romania with the purpose of upgrading Romanian universities and updating the educational curricula so that young students would grow up to be first-hand personalities in their fields. Upon the seizure of power by the Communists, many of these scholars were purged for being 'fascists', 'reactionary elements', or 'cosmopolites', and were never allowed to teach again. A few portrayed educators include: Nicolae Mărgineanu (psychologist; educated in Leipzig, Berlin, Hamburg, Paris, London; received a Rockefeller scholarship, but

⁹⁹ The Oxford Dictionary defines a Stakhanovite as a worker in the former Soviet Union who was exceptionally hard-working and productive.

decided to return to Romania; arrested by the Communists for the ‘crime of plotting against social order’ and imprisoned for 16 years); Istrate Micescu (famous attorney, professor, former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sentenced to 20 years in prison, dies in the Aiud Penitentiary in 1951), or Anton Golopenția (professor, sociologist, director of the Romanian Institute of Statistics, deceased in 1951 in the Văcărești Penitentiary). One panel portrays Constantin Rădulescu-Motru - president of the Romanian Academy, professor, psychologist, denied pension and expropriated by the Communists for being a ‘landowning beast’ – narrating his drama: ‘I have no food or wood for the fire. And former university professors and members of the Romanian Academy share my fate. Had the people who represent the Bolshevik Communism in Romania been slightly humane, they would not torment us like this, and they would just shoot us or burn us alive’. Other displayed testimonials speak of the intellectuals’ life behind bars, for example: ‘In the cell to my right Manu¹⁰⁰ was brought. [...] I was happy to have him as my neighbor, a professor of nuclear physics at the University of Bucharest, who introduced me to the mysteries of atom’s structure through the opening of our shared flue. We were talking for hours, and we communicated our shared knowledge to others. [...] Our intellectual concerns made us forget about the inhumanity we were subjected to. The advantage, the great advantage of the imprisoned intellectual was this: the richness of his life which made him feel self-sufficient and not feel alone no matter of his location. Eventually, we experienced five or even ten days of lock-up in cells of 60x60 centimeters, with nails

¹⁰⁰ Gheorghe Manu was a Romanian physicist, member of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, innovator in nuclear physics, arrested by the Communists for his right-wing political affiliation and deceased in the Aiud Penitentiary on 12th April 1961 (Jijie, 2002).

sticking out of their walls so we could not rest on them. [...] We could endure these new, criminal, unimaginable-in-their-inhumanity conditions only through retreating in our own conscience, where we found enough peace of mind to not lose self-confidence. Confidence in people and in ourselves. And in the righteousness in the world, which must, ultimately, prevail.' There are tens of such testimonials of or about intellectual elites purged by the Communist regime in room 39. Iconically adding drama to these narratives are photographs of major educational centers in the flourishing interwar times. Due to the refined lifestyle, the interwar Bucharest is still affectionately and colloquially referred to as 'Little Paris' by many Romanians. These period images and the profiles of the interwar elites are iconically contrasted by their destinies during the Communist regime. They also symbolically signify the rise and fall of modern Romania by allowing its existential peak (the interwar period) to face its bleakest period (the Communist regime). Iconically adding scale to this narrative is a list of 1,362 imprisoned professors and the museum curators' statement that 'the complete list of imprisoned secondary educators is much longer'. Also, two displayed items add materiality and texture to the narrative: an original wooden school desk and a chalkboard. Due to their banality in Romanian schools in both Communist and post-Communist times, it is presumed that these items indexically trigger strong emotional connections between the Romanian visitors and the narrative on display based on identitarian self-identification.



Figure 25 : Original Period School Desk

Room 40 continues the presentation of the purge against intellectuals and exhibits 'The destruction of the Romanian Academy'. As the leading intellectual institution of Romania, the Romanian Academy¹⁰¹ was vehemently attacked by the Communist regime under the pretext of its 'democratization' and need to purify itself of 'reactionary elements'. A presidential decree in 1948 transforms it into the 'Academy of the People's Republic of Romania' with the main objective of 'increasing the material and cultural standards of the people'. A large panel displays a list of 108 members expelled from the Romanian Academy by the Communist authorities. Two other panels portray tens of members of the Academy arrested, and – in many cases – died in prison. In presenting the

¹⁰¹ On the history and purge of the Romanian Academy during Communist times: Rusu (1997, 1999), Berindei (2006).

fate of the leading intellectual and educational institution of Romania, this room iconically signifies the fracture between old traditional Romania and the new sovietized one.

Entitled 'Ethnic repression', room 41 exhibits the suffering of Romania's ethnic minorities during the Communist regime. In January 1945 approximately 75,000 Romanians of German ethnicity were transported to the USSR to 'rebuild' the war-ravaged economy. Twenty percent of them passed away, while the rest were only allowed to return to Romania five years later. In the subsequent years, the Communist authorities of Romania were allegedly involved in the selling¹⁰² of ethnic Germans and Jews to Germany and Israel. One displayed quote attributed to Nicolae Ceaușescu¹⁰³ – the last Communist dictator of Romania – reads: 'For us, Jews, Germans, and oil are the most profitable products for export'. Other documents on display state that approximately 430,000 Romanians of German ethnicity were relocated to Germany between 1950 and 1999 for fees per person ranging from 1,800 German Marks (category I – a person with no education) to 11,000 Marks (category C – university graduate). The persecution of Romanian Jews followed a similar pattern. Purged under the accusation of engaging in 'Zionism', tens of thousands of Jews were repatriated to Israel for monetary fees or products. The Hungarian community in Transylvania was also persecuted, especially after the Hungarian anti-Communist uprising in 1956. The mix of documents, photographs,

¹⁰² On the selling of Germans and Jews during the Communist times of Romania: Both (2014), Ioanid (2015).

¹⁰³ Important works on the life, rule, and personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu: Kunze (2002), Gabanyi (2003), du Bois (2008), Betea, Diac, Mihai, & Țiu (2012, 2013), Betea, Mihai, & Țiu (2015), Anton (2016), Burakowski (2016), Marin (2016).

and foreign newspapers depicting the international reaction to these purges iconically internationalizes the suffering under the Communist regime.

The next room – room 42 – is themed 'Art behind Bars'¹⁰⁴, and depicts the repression – surveillance, censorship, arrest - against artists considered subversive or too Westernized. The ultimate purpose was to instill fear and subsequent self-censorship among artists. A quote on display reads: 'Then the trials started, which did not take place in the tribunals. They took place at the Opera House, at the Faculty of Law...Who was trialed? We were, the intellectuals! To instill fear! I will never forget when they took us from the theatre, I had rehearsals that day at the Teatrul Mic. [...] They loaded all of us on a bus and took us to the Faculty of Law, next to the Opera House. [...] When we entered the hall we looked up and saw the entire venue full of people, but they were not our people from the theatre. They were so-called workers. [...] A trial started. Those on the stage were the accused, and we were the audience in a tribunal. What were they accused of? They were accused of being enemies of the people, plotters against the regime. [...] The moment they lifted the curtain, those people upstairs started shouting: >> Death upon them! Deeeath! <<. This is the first sounds I heard. I will never forget it. It was meant to traumatize us. Everything was made for us, to traumatize us. They had to tighten the screw and organized a demonstration of what could happen to us'. This testimonial indexically signifies the individual and collective permanent state of induced fear which characterized the Communist period.

¹⁰⁴ On the evolution of arts during the Communist regime: Vasile (2010, 2011, 2015), Cârnelci (2013), Pelin (2016).

A panel depicts classical monuments – most of them busts of former great leaders of democratic Romania - demolished and traditional songs banned by the Communists. Erich Bergel and Dimitrie Cuclin in music, Constantin Tănase, and Mărioana Voiculescu in theatre, Corneliu Baba and Nicolae David in the fine arts are among the hundreds of internationally-acclaimed Romanian artists purged by the Communists. Numerous theatre plays were banned or heavily amended to pass the censorship committees. A special attention due to its popularity was given to cinematography. One panel shows how numerous movies were banned by the Communist censors. Among them is ‘The Reenactment’ by Romanian director Lucian Pintilie, considered by many as the best Romanian movie ever made. The movie was banned due to being filmed in a solidarity movement of intellectuals with the Czechoslovaks following their invasion by the USSR. Another reason is its topic: the invasive involvement of state authorities in the lives of simple people. Following the banning of ‘The Reenactment’ and other works of his, Lucian Pintilie – one of the leading Romanian directors – decided to seek asylum in the West. Yet another panel depicts the portrait and photographed words of sculptor Constantin Brâncuși¹⁰⁵, who is known among Romanians as the national artist and considered by critics one of the most important artists of the 20th century. An official document of the Communist Party calls the works of Brâncuși unfit to be displayed in Romanian museums. Having as a reference point Lenin’s theory on formalism in art, this document reads: ‘Brâncuși cannot be considered as a creator in sculpture because he does

¹⁰⁵ On the life and treatment of Constantin Brancuși by the Communist authorities: Țugui (2001), Brezianu (2006), Buican (2011).

not express himself through means which are essential and characteristic to this form of art’.

The items displayed in room 42 symbolically signify the reversal of the societal system of values from a free and innovative society to one driven by fear, formalism, (self)censorship, and ideology. As these artists are ever-so-present in modern-day Romania, it is presumed that the exhibits stimulate strong emotional identitarian reactions within domestic visitors.

The theme of repressed intellectuals is further developed in room 43 labeled ‘Writers in prison’. As seen before, the strict censorship of culture in its diverse forms was key in the Communists’ attempt to create the ‘new man’. The literary branch of culture was among the most oppressed, as iconically signified by a document which shows that, by 1st May 1948, 8,438 titles viewed as ‘politically undesirable’¹⁰⁶ were banned and removed from circulation. The list includes the names of the most important writers in Romanian literature, such as the national poet Mihai Eminescu (37 forbidden titles) and the national historian Nicolae Iorga (214 banned titles). As the list contains writers studied by all Romanians during their forming years in school, the panel displaying their forbidden works is presumed to trigger negative emotions towards the Communist regime based on the visitors’ self-identification with the mentioned scholars. The main reason for the banning of these works is their European and especially their national character. All the writers mentioned in this document have extensively written about and in the spirit of

¹⁰⁶ On the publishing regime in Communist Romania: Macrea-Toma (2006).

the Romanian tradition. Under the newly established Communist regime, the national character of the culture was to be replaced by Socialist realism. The official view of the Communist Party on the traditional writers and on the proper literary path is displayed on a panel which reads: 'To speak about Eminescu means to speak about the times he lived in. But those who follow his style of writing in the present have no justification [...]. All they do is oppose and annihilate the attempts of the new cultural forces to remove what is unhealthy, hostile, backward in the development of our society, in the action of enlightening the people'. A similar quote reads, in the same typical wooden language: 'This means [...] that the central point of our creation should be the new man, who grows in our country, the new man educated by the Party, animated by his burning love for his motherland, the constructor of Socialism, the fighter for peace. At the same time, we have to learn to expose the beastly nature of American imperialism'. The following commitment was made at the end of a 1956 Congress: '[...] the writers are committed to strongly combat everyone who rises against the Party line'. Lastly, a displayed quote from the 1956 Resolution of the Writers' Congress reads: 'Upon its ending, the Congress expresses, in the name of all writers, their deep appreciation to the Workers' Party of Romania and its Central Committee for their care and continuous support. The Congress ensures the working people and the Party that writers will work restlessly for enriching the cultural thesaurus of our motherland, to be worthy of the era of great achievements, the era of the construction of Socialism, the era of the immortal ideas of Marxism-Leninism'. The fact that Communists imprisoned the intellectual elite of Romania for the precise reason of being so dedicated to the Romanian roots – while aggressively

promoting the culture of hatred and ideological servitude – is presumed to iconically amplify the domestic visitors' negativity towards Communism.

Panels around the room display case studies of important Romanian writers arrested by the Communist authorities: Alice Voinescu, Vasile Voiculescu, Lucian Blaga, Nicolae Steinhardt. Each profile contains a chronology of the arrest, documents of surveillance and detention, statements about their behavior in prison, and personal quotes or testimonials. The reasons for their arrest employ the typical wooden language: 'plotting against social order', 'continuous antidemocratic attitude', 'writing mystical poetry', 'reading mystic-religious materials', 'having hostile discussions about the popular democratic regime of the People's Republic of Romania', 'arguing with hostility that there is no freedom in the current regime', or 'commenting, in a hostile tone to our regime, the news transmitted by imperialist radio stations'. As already mentioned, all documents issued by the Communist authorities tend to abound in the wooden language specific to totalitarian regimes. This wooden language omnipresent in the documents exhibited in room 43 is in strong contrast with the rich, analytical and refined writing of the intellectual elite imprisoned by the Communist regime, as indexically signified by displayed original writings which have become masterpieces of Romanian literature, such as Nicolae Steinhardt's 'Journal of Happiness'. Iconically adding drama to the narrative are quotes depicting these writers' condition behind bars. One such quote reads: 'He [Constant Tonegaru] is liberated six months later than scheduled, in serious health condition, and dies three months later when a splinter from his bones cracked while being tortured punctures his heart. He was 33 years old'. A similar one reads: '[...] on a late autumn evening, he [Vasile Voiculescu] was brought by two stretcher-bearers to the infirmary of

the Aiud Prison with a body temperature of 39 degrees. He was seriously ill, with a scary diagnosis: progressive pulmonary tuberculosis, right sub-clavicular, together with an advanced process of dystrophy. He was so weak that we did not want to touch him for fear he would be pulverized, and we were watching him in perplexity trying to get off the stretcher, desperately holding onto his prison uniform, in a superhuman struggle against the shivers who were shaking him. We obtained a bed quickly for him in a sheltered section and covered him with our blankets to remove the stiffness from his frozen legs’.

Except for the panels presenting individual cases, one panel in room 43 exhibits an extraordinary trial in both the nature of the conviction and the names of those convicted. This board displays what is known as the ‘Noica-Pillar Trial¹⁰⁷’. It is a known fact among Romanians that the entire judicial procedure, in this case, was framed to frighten the intellectuals into self-censorship and obedience. All that the authorities could accuse the intellectuals of at the end of a terrible interrogation was reading two works by other two leading intellectuals of Romania – Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran – who had already fled into exile. Also, all the evidence they collected were religious poems and philosophical manuscripts. Following a staged trial, 23 prominent Romanian intellectuals – male and female – were convicted to heavy prison sentences ranging between 6 and 25 years. This case iconically signifies the scale of repression, while symbolically signifying the nature of the Communist *modus operandi*.

¹⁰⁷ On the Noica-Pillat Trial: Tănase (2003).

One stripe comprised of tens of documents used for the imprisonment of writers surrounds the room like a belt and iconically signifies the magnitude of the repression against the intellectual elite of Romania. This magnitude is further reinforced through a double-sided panel in the middle of the room portraying tens of arrested writers. Adding materiality and texture to the narrative are original typewriters scattered around the room (Figure 26).



Figure 26 : ‘Writers in Prison’

Two other items on display – a church candlestick and a copy of the Bible who had belonged to writer Vasile Voiculescu until his arrest – iconically signify the strong Christian nature of the works and lives of most of the repressed scholars. In fact, this commitment to Christianity is one primary accusation for their imprisonment. In a preponderantly Christian nation, a display of the intellectual elite being arrested precisely

for having written in the spirit of Romanian Orthodox tradition is presumed to symbolically stir intense adverse emotional reactions against Communism within domestic visitors.

Moving forward, room 44 is themed ‘Solidarność’ and displays numerous photographs to iconically signify the development and evolution of the union in Gdansk, Poland, which ultimately led to the downfall of Communism in 1989. Instances of dramatic struggles for liberation, of families fighting for the freedom of their children, and of masses of people gathered around a Christian Cross in prayer – strong pillars of Romanian tradition, as mentioned - is presumed to symbolically trigger feelings of solidarity through self-identification with the lives and values of the Polish people within domestic visitors at the Sighet Museum. The display of the Polish Solidarność movement in the Sighet Museum iconically internationalizes the suffering caused by Communist regimes and the anti-Communist struggles.

The following room – room 46 – details ‘Article 209¹⁰⁸’ of the Penal Code based on which a third of the political convictions after 1948 were decided. A section of this room displays different issues of the ‘Scântea’ official newspaper of the Communist Party announcing ‘1948: The Year of the Great Transformations in Justice’, and setting the tone for the upcoming years: ‘Let’s keep vigil and expose the plots of the enemies of the working people’. The announcement of the legislative reform is realized in the typical wooden language, with newspaper titles such as: ‘Great achievements await us in the

¹⁰⁸ On Article 209 and the use of legislation as a tool of repression by the Communist regime: Marcu (2016).

upcoming year! There is nothing left to set us back on the path to complete development of our popular democracy!’, ‘Rich landowners trialed for sabotage’, ‘Rich landowners in the Dorohoi region trialed for sabotage’, ‘Let’s uncover the vile deeds of the rich landowners: Rich landowners sued for attempting to sabotage the preparations for sowing’, ‘The workers enthusiastically greeted the laws voted by the Great National Assembly’, or ‘The soldiers in the Army of the PRR enthusiastically greeted the laws voted by the Great National Assembly’. A signified aspect of wooden language is the uncountable repetition of ‘people’s justice’ in titles or the main text of articles. The fact that titles are almost identical iconically signifies the centralized nature of the press under the Communist regime.

Article 209 defined the ambiguous ‘plotting against the Socialist order’ or ‘plotting against state order’ which allowed for prison sentences to be handed down arbitrarily for a wide range of alleged actions, from being part of an anti-Communist organization to having ‘hostile’ discussions or even telling jokes about the Communists. Six rows of examples of reasons and pretexts where article 209 was invoked to hand down prison sentences iconically signify the arbitrary and – in the words of the museum curators – sadistic nature of the Communist judicial system. Such reasons include: ‘not informing the local militia about the anti-Communist partisans in the mountains’, ‘cutting the phone wires by the railway’, ‘being visited by elite members of the Peasant Party and not denouncing them’, ‘plotting – during the classes of political materials he asked some questions which led to his arrest’, ‘not denouncing her runaway fiancée’, ‘maintaining communication with the right-wing Socialists in France’, ‘speaking hostile words about the People’s Republic of Romania’, ‘not releasing the obligatory quotas of cereals’,

‘singing the forbidden song Long Live the King’, and so on. The arbitrary nature of these convictions is also seen from their lengths: one year for beating up an activist, 16 years for not denouncing someone, and 20-25 years for speaking with ‘hostility’ about the Party or State. If this panel simply lists a wide range of reasons and pretexts, the entire opposite wall iconically personalizes the nature of the Communist justice system by portraying 64 political prisoners of varied professions, education, ethnicity, sex, age, religious denominations, political preferences, and alleged pretexts for imprisonment. By far the most popular reason for arrest is ‘plotting against the social order’. The impact of this article is iconically signified by the panel quoting the estimated number of 180,000 Romanians convicted based on article 209.

Greeting the visitors in room 46 is a distorted version of Justitia or Lady Justice¹⁰⁹, the Roman goddess transformed into the international symbol of justice (Figure 27). Typically, it is depicted as a female figure with three symbolical features: a blindfold standing for the impartiality and objectivity of all judicial acts, a scale in her left hand representing the fairness and balance of justice, and a sword in her right hand symbolizing the strength of justice. These three features have been purposefully altered in room 46: Lady Justice in Romania wears a red blindfold only on one eye, her scale is out of balance because of a red weight inscribed ‘209’, and her sword is replaced by a red hammer-and-sickle. These three changes – emphasized in red color - symbolically signify the wholly

¹⁰⁹ On the international symbolism of Lady Justice: Douzinas & Nead (1999), Knox (2014).

distorted and arbitrary nature of the judicial system under the Communist regime in Romania purposefully induced through article 209 of the Penal Code.

The narrative on display in room 46 gains further meaning when seen through the filter of the Christian belief in the Last Judgement when souls may be allowed to rise to the Heavens based on their worldly actions. In this room, the absolution and possibility of salvation granted by the divine justice according to Christian Orthodox belief are symbolically contrasted by the arbitrary and sadistic justice of the Communist regime which, for many, only led to damnation and torment.



Figure 27 : *Justitia* in Communist Context

Room 47 revisits the ‘Deportations to Bărăgan’¹¹⁰, on 18th June 1951, when approximately 45,000 people – adults, pregnant women, children, senior citizens of different ethnicities – were forcefully removed from their homes in the counties neighbouring Yugoslavia, loaded on trains under the pressure of 22,000 forces of repression, and unloaded in the Bărăgan steppes of South-Eastern Romania. The mentioning of the eldest deportee – a 95-year old man – symbolically signifies the cruelty of the regime. To keep the deportees in total isolation, the Communist authorities announced that the deportees were Korean. With no support or private possessions – all of their personal possessions had been confiscated by the Communist authorities – the people took hold of small patches of land where they built mud or adobe houses with roofs of reed or straw. They established 18 new settlements and sustained themselves through small-scale agriculture. Ultimately, approximately 1,700 people passed away in these new settlements.

The walls in room 47 are covered in personal photos depicting the lives of deported families. Clearly visible is the deportees’ strong connection to the land which, more than ever before, ensured their entire existence from the raw materials for building their houses to household items such as clay pots, and from agriculture to burial places. These photographs symbolically materialize Romanians’ mythological belief in the sanctity of the land, while, at the same time, signifying the intense dramas caused by the forced collectivization of agricultural land during the Communist regime. Scattered

¹¹⁰ On the forced deportations of Romanians to the Bărăgan plains: Vultur (1997, 2006), Spijavca (2004), Calestru (2006), Goma (2008), Rusan, Bilcea, Boca, Cârstea, & Ion (2011), Ungureanu (2011), Sofronie (2014), Antonovici & Dobre (2016).

around the room are original items which belonged to deported families, such as traditional handmade costumes, scarves, and tablecloths, books, oil lamps, a manual cotton gin, a handmade wooden suitcase, tableware, charcoal irons, a stake with an inscribed house number: 407 (it belonged to Idvoreanu Teodor, deported to the new settlement Răchitoasa who lived at the house numbered 407), and a holy icon. In their original and palpable nature, these items indexically bring the past into the present (Figure 28). Adding to this is their banality and familiarity since these are items which can still be found in the everyday household of Romanians. Moreover, the items on display symbolically draw upon the aforementioned pillars of Romanian collective consciousness: Christian Orthodoxy, the sanctity of one's land, house, and family, or the sacred cycle of life. Based on these aspects, it is presumed that room 47 triggers strong emotions of negativity towards the Communist regime within domestic visitors through their compassionate self-identification with the deportees' territorial and socio-cultural forced uprootal.



Figure 28 : Personal Belongings of Deportees and Panels Naming the Deceased

The next room – room 48 – exhibits the 'Anti-Communist resistance in the mountains'¹¹¹. Greeting the visitors on a massive back wall is a map of Romania onto which most of the groups of resistance are marked to iconically signify the scale of the phenomenon. Flanking this map are two panels listing 41 resistance groups activating in different sections of the Carpathian Mountains and the Dobrudja region.

The anti-Communist resistance became active soon after the Communists seized power, when many of those opposing the purges in the Army, the subjugation of religious and educational institutions, as well as those resisting forced collectivization were arrested or executed. Not only those who opposed the new regime directly had to suffer, but also their families and friends. Against this wave of aggression, groups of resistance composed of 10-40 people of all ages, sexes, political orientations, or social and professional categories took to the mountains armed with pistols and machine guns left over from the war. Individual panels for each of the major groups are displayed around the room and iconically signify their composition, organization, actions, confrontations, and liquidation. They obtained food, clothes, and occasional shelter from villagers. The Communist propaganda labeled both the partisans and their supporters as 'bandits'. To catch the members of the resistance groups, the Securitate turned to terrorize their families through means such as expelling their children from school, or arresting, torturing, and executing family members and friends.

¹¹¹ On the anti-Communist resistance in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania: Milin (1998), Duică (2005), Radosav (2006), Brișcă (2004, 2005, 2007), Brișcă & Ciuceanu (2007), Bjoza (2008), Pop-Săileanu (2008), Motoc (2011), Vasilescu (2013), Popa (2015).

The purpose of defeating the Communist regime and its repressive mechanism was realistically unachievable, but what the resistance groups did was undermine the regime's claim of having complete control over the country. Ultimately, most of the members of the resistance groups were killed either in armed confrontations with the repressive forces or executed in prison. Death as an assumed sacrifice for freedom is indexically materialized in this room through the displayed clothes of a student who willingly became part of an anti-Communist resistance group in the Făgăraș Mountains. Arrested in 1949, he was brought back to his village in chains and executed as an example to all those who dared to oppose the regime. His displayed clothes still bearing the bullet and knife holes from his execution indexically signify the totalitarian and authoritarian nature of the Communist regime and the brutal repression against anyone who opposed them (Figure 29).



Figure 29 : Student's Clothes Bearing the Signs of His Execution

Through the filter of Christian values and beliefs already mentioned, the anti-Communist partisans' choices and actions depicted in this room symbolically resemble Christ's assumed sacrificial crucifixion towards the salvation of mankind. They gain further meaning when linked to the fundamental purpose of any human existence according to Christian belief: freedom.

Room 49 which depicts 'The student movements in Romania'. News about the 1956 anti-Communist uprising in Hungary quickly spread across the nations of the Eastern Bloc. In Romania, it was the students who took action, and large protests started in big cities such as Timișoara, București, and Cluj. The students in Timișoara released a 15-point memorandum – displayed in room 49 – asking for: the complete abolishment of the personality cult, the abolishment of obligatory industrial and agricultural quotas, the increase of minimum income according to the prices of the time, the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania, the signing of economic contracts of cooperation with other non-Soviet states, freedom of press and speech, the removal of Russian language as a compulsory language, the decrease in the number of classes in Marxism and political economy, open examination sessions at all universities, the publishing of the memorandum in the local and central press, better living conditions for students, and no reprisals against the authors of the memorandum. The authorities' reaction – as iconically signified in displayed documents - was to identify the 'hostile elements', arrest more than 2,000 students, and convict the student leaders to 3-8 years in prison. Student unions led by loyal Party members were established for supervising student activities, and their role was announced in the typical wooden language: 'Student unions contribute to the multilateral development of young intellectuals equipped with

the scientific worldview of the working class – Marxism-Leninism – committed to the cause of constructing Socialism; they educate them in the spirit of Socialist patriotism, of love and loyalty to the People’s Republic of Romania, of active participation in our people’s struggle towards strengthening the democrat-popular state, of peace’.

Thus, the documents and photos displayed in room 49 iconically continue the topics of repression against intellectuals and resistance to the Communization of Romania. Similarly to the previous room, the students’ anti-Communist resistance gains meaning when connected to the Christian existential concept of ‘freedom’.

Room 50 exhibits ‘The Pitești Phenomenon ¹¹²’, which refers to the brutal repression of students’ elites. Having already imprisoned or deported the elites among politicians, intellectuals, diplomats, clergy, military institutions, magistrates, and industrious peasants, the Communists focused their attention on the students considered as the bridge between generations and an unpredictable social force. A panel in this room explains how the Pitești Experiment was developed by the Communist authorities with the purpose of ‘re-educating’ students in the Party line using physical and psychological torture. Through a diverse range of barbarous methods of torture, students were made to mentally and physically abuse and humiliate each other, and also to mentally and

¹¹² The 1970 Nobel Prize laureate for literature and Russian anti-Communist dissident, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, calls the Pitești Phenomenon the ‘most terrible act of barbarism in the contemporary world’ (quoted in Agerpres, 2010). Works of historical synthesis on the Pitești Phenomenon: Cesereanu (2006), Lăcătușu & Mureșan (2009), Mureșan (2010), Ioniță (2016). On the Pitești Phenomenon and the spreading of the re-education through torture to other prisons across Romania: Stan (2010), Stănescu (2010a, 2010b, 2012). Autobiographical works of lived experiences in the Pitești Phenomenon: Goma (1990), Ierunca (1990), Voinea (1996), Popa (1999), Bordeianu (2001), Popescu (2005), Ianolide (2006), Vișovan (2006), Bacu (2011), Buracu (2012), Purcărea (2012).

emotionally mutilate themselves by denigrating their own families, roots, and values. This operation of depersonalization and moral assassination was meant to push students to the lowest possible moral decay – when students could do to others what has been done to them - from which the bases for the New Soviet Man could be laid.

The walls are scattered with testimonials of Romanians who experienced the Pitești Experiment first hand. One of them reads: 'In this so-called action of depersonalization, students were forced, through permanent unimaginable tortures, to betray their dearest beings: God, their own parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. They were coerced to drink urine and eat feces! Man was crushed this way. Disgusted with his own weakness, he would never again recover against his conscience. The pains were stronger than human being's ability to resist.' Another one reads: 'The beatings (received from my cellmates) were enough to upset many things within me. This time I was not beaten by enemies whose purposes I understood. But these people close to me, who shared my beliefs, who had feared God and loved people, how could they have changed like this?'. Yet another one reads: 'The peak of this calvary was the punishment of poor Niță Cornel, on the evening of 26th February 1950. [...] Țurcanu set the pack on him. First, he punched him a few times; then he pushed him in a circle of 6-7 torturers who began punching and kicking him, pushing him from one to the other until he collapsed with dizziness. Țurcanu was furiously walking around the room and thinking of a new method of torture, when we hear him ordering for Cornel's hands to be tied behind his back and for Vasile Pușcașu - the colossus who was also the strongest among them – to pick him up. Pușcașu got up on the side of the bed, turned Cornel around and suspended him in the air in a position which resembled the Crucifixion. The poor child, with his head on his

chest, barely had the power for a heart-rending cry when his arms were dislocated, and then he was desperately trying to inhale. Four or five torturers were sadistically hitting him with clubs over his head and legs, in an infernal zest to destroy life. After tens of hits, they released him. He collapsed inertly, face down, with no ability to move from that spot’.

There are tens of such testimonials scattered around the room which iconically signify the murderous and cruel nature of the Communist regime. Reinforcing this idea is the central point of the room: a panel listing 27 names of students killed during the Pitești Experiment. These testimonials speaking of atrocities purposefully committed with the purpose of coercing the political prisoners to turn against their faith, families, and roots – fundamental pillars of Romanianness, as discussed – iconically signifies the rupture of the traditional and moral fabric of society brought by the Communist regime. The fact that their freedom – the metaphysical and physical goal of Christians – was conditioned to the denigration and rejection of one’s existential pillars symbolically signifies the diabolical nature of the regime and is presumed to trigger strong emotional reactions within Romanian visitors. Choosing to portray these quotes in a font resembling handwriting further iconically personalizes the suffering and dramas of political prisoners who experienced the Pitești Experiment.

The following room – room 51 – talks about the ‘Poetry in prison’¹¹³, by displaying tens of poems composed, passed on, or memorized in the Communist prisons of Romania.

¹¹³ A thorough compendium of poems written by political prisoners behind bars: Mănăstirea Petru Vodă (2010).

Almost all of them mention God and other religious concepts, which symbolically confirms a well-known fact among Romanians: resistance in the Communist prisons was only possible through faith. This resistance is also symbolically signified through a displayed original medical bandage used by a political prisoner to transmit poems. Composed without paper or pencil, poems were transmitted across cells using Morse code tapped out on the walls or knitted in medical bandages (Figure 30). In this context, the displayed bandage including poems knitted in Morse code indexically signifies the means of communication among prisoners, while symbolically signifying the prisoners' intellectual, mental, and political resistance to the Communization of Romania.



Figure 30 : Knitted Poem in Morse Language

Other recurring themes are family, hope, freedom, land, death, and philosophical existential questionings of one's life. Thus, these intimate records of prisoners' existential

perceptions are symbolically connected to and given meaning by previously discussed core elements of Romanian mythological and Christian thought: the sacred nature of one's family, cycle of life, and land; the archaic funeral rituals; freedom as the ultimate life goal; and the Christian calls for humans to carry one's Cross in the name of Truth, and to display compassionate behavior towards others.

Themed 'Women in prison'¹¹⁴, room 53 exhibits female prisoners' lives in Communist penitentiaries dedicated exclusively to women. Birth and motherhood gained new dimensions in the Romanian Communist prisons, as women giving birth in prison were separated from their children. One panel presents the case of Iuliana Preduț, who gave birth - during a 12-year sentence – to a girl she named Freedom-Justice. Three months later the child was taken from her mother and placed in an orphanage. Giving birth in a place of suffering and forced separation is symbolically contrasted by the positive, liberating, life-affirming, and sacred attributes of birth in archaic Romanian tradition. The name she chose for her daughter is symbolically rooted in the previously discussed existential pillars of Romanian tradition: freedom as the driver and ultimate life goal, and the expectation that everyone will pay at the Final Judgement for his or her worldly deeds. On display under Iuliana Preduț's case study is a bar of soap sent to her while in detention by her husband and inscribed 'Loving you eternally – Nicu'. In its intimacy and message, this item materializes the familial dramas caused by the

¹¹⁴ (Auto)biographical works on the prison experiences of female political detainees during the Communist regime: Oțel Petrescu (2008, 2012), Ghițescu (2012), Nicolau & Nițu (2012), Constante (2013a, 2013b), Răduleanu (2013), Vancu (2014).

Communist regime by symbolically signifying two dialectical existential aspects of the Romanian gulag: love – fear, and freedom – forced separation.

Another panel presents a similar case. Ioana Voicu-Arnăuțoiu was born in a hideaway in the Carpathian Mountains from two anti-Communist partisan parents. Her father was executed, her mother died in the Miercurea Ciuc prison, and she was placed in an orphanage only to find out her true identity after 1990. This example reinforces the previous one and gains dramatic meaning through the filter of the Christian teaching of sacrificing oneself for Truth and Freedom.



Figure 31 : Elisabeta Rizea's Traditional Romanian Peasant's Shirt

One other item on display is a traditional Romanian peasant's shirt which belonged to Elisabeta Rizea, who, as already mentioned, endured tortures such as having her scalp stripped away from her head rather than denouncing her anti-Communist

partisan husband (Figure 31). This item indexically materializes the violent rupture of the fabric of Romanian tradition, while symbolically signifying the fate of the female peasantry who chose to follow the Christian teaching of sacrificing oneself for Freedom and Truth.

A large panel presents tens of portraits of female prisoners arrested by the Communist authorities for providing support to the anti-Communist partisans and convicted – under the aforementioned article 209 – for 'plotting against the social order'. Iconically adding magnitude to these portrayals of suffering is a list of 4,200 women arrested during the Communist regime which cover the entire top section and ceiling of the room.

Room 53 is labeled 'Intellectual life in prison' and displays items handmade by political prisoners behind bars (Figure 32). These items include poetry sewn on cloth, sculpted pendants depicting religious themes, sculpted religious items (icons, crosses, votive lamp), dictionaries, a chess set, or a poetry anthology in French compiled from memory by Romanian army officers imprisoned in Siberia. One wall depicts the works of internationally-acclaimed master painter Nicolae David who spent four years in the Communist prisons for 'plotting against the social order'. The paintings on display are realized in blood during his time in prison. This room iconically continues the topic of faith and art as means of resistance to the Sovietization of Romania.

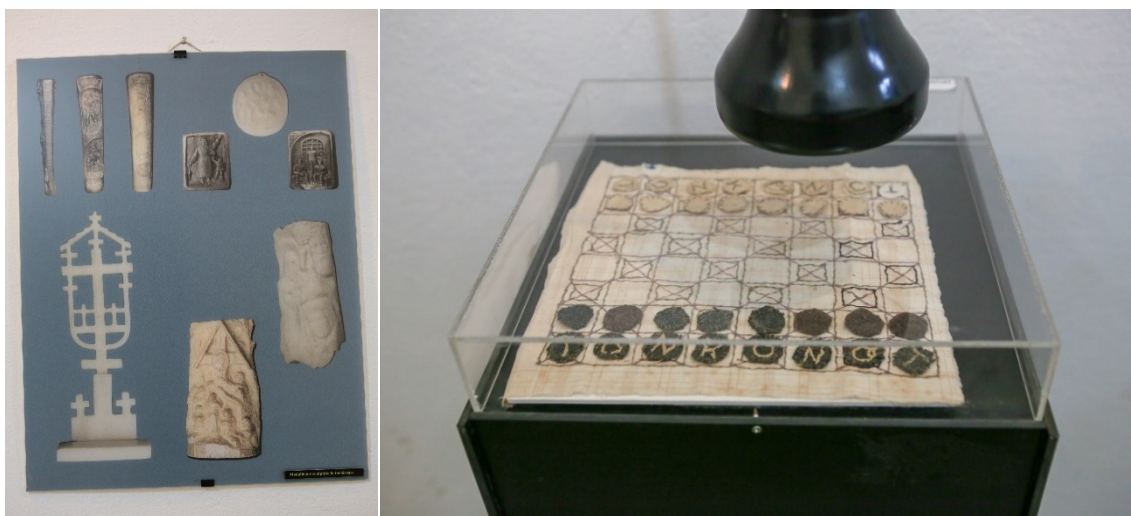


Figure 32 : Items Handmade by Political Prisoners

Connected rooms 54-58 are themed 'Gheorghe I. Brătianu – A historian in history', and tell the story of one of the most respected figures in Romanian historiography. Gheorghe I. Brătianu was born in a family whose roots can be traced to the 16th century, and whose involvement in the most important moments of the country's history – territorial unification, independence gain, democratic reforms - is well known among Romanians. Educated in historiography in France, Gheorghe I. Brătianu chose to return and teach in Romania. He chose an academic career as he perceived it, according to a quote on display, as 'the best means for evoking the national past, for safekeeping national traditions [...] for setting the historical studies on the strong foundation of hard science'. In a different displayed quote on education, he mentions: 'I have always considered the professor's desk [...] as a tribune where the voice of Truth should always be heard'. He wrote extensively on the establishment of the Romanian states, and on the Romanian unity, based on which he became a member of the Romanian Academy. He was also a prominent member of the Liberal Party and chose to be an officer on the front

in both World Wars. The newly established Communist regime asked Gheorghe I. Brătianu to reject and denigrate his entire historical work in which he argued that Bessarabia had historically belonged to Romania. He rejected and was consequently excluded from academia, from research, from the Romanian Academy, and eventually arrested in May 1950. Without a trial and conviction, he was imprisoned in the Sighet Penitentiary where he passed away in April 1953. A displayed quote depicts his last days: ‘[...] on 25th April 1953 I saw him walking alone, looking down, in a fast pace, forced by his warden, Laviță Vasile [...] who kept on insulting him without a break. I do not know if he was also beating him. Every once in a while, Gheorghe Brătianu was looking towards the sky as if he was praying or seeking God’s protection. He looked exhausted, concerned, depressed. Weakness and great sadness were visible on his face. The warden kept on shouting, insulting, and terrorizing him. It was the last time I saw him. Two days later, on 27th April, I found out about his death.’

The photographs, documents, and personal items displayed in this room iconically signify the prodigious educational, scientific, and political life of a leading Romanian figure: the historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu. The stark contrast between his life before imprisonment and his extermination in the Sighet Penitentiary symbolically signifies the violent shift between democratic pre-Communist Romania and the totalitarian Communist one. Considering the centuries-old involvement of the Brătianu family in the history of Romania, the death of Gheorghe I. Brătianu in the Communist prison also symbolically signifies the rupture of the Romanian political and historical thread of continuity.

The visit on the second floor begins with room 68 which, similarly to the previous floor, reconstructs a 'Black' cell where recalcitrant prisoners were held in conditions of total darkness. The symbolism of such a display has already been discussed.

Room 69 is themed 'Persecuted families' and exhibits hundreds of family photographs received from members of families who were purged during the Communist times. Having already touched upon aspects of familial suffering, the hundreds of photos are meant to iconically signify the scale of the repression. Contrasting the photographs of normal and happy family pre-Communist life with the fate of these families during the Communist times symbolically signifies the violent rupture of the Romanian fabric of tradition (Figure 33). This perception is accentuated by the display of large photos of Romanian agricultural land which symbolically signifies the strong connection between families and their land. Considering the mythological importance of family and land in the Romanian tradition, as already discussed, this display is presumed to trigger strong emotional reactions within domestic visitors.

The entire back wall of the room displays a large tree whose entire shape contains the profiles of 98 broken families. This exhibit gains meaning through its connection to one of the most important and popular symbols of Christianity: the Cosmic Tree or Tree of Life¹¹⁵. It symbolizes the perpetual and cyclical evolution of cosmic life. It facilitates the communion among the three levels of cosmic life: the underground – through its roots, the surface of the earth – through its trunk, and the skies – through its branches. Thus, the

¹¹⁵ On the mythological and Orthodox symbolism of the 'Tree of Life': Murphy (2002), Petcu (2010), Rose (2011), Eliade (2013).

Tree of Life appears as a center of existence where the earth and skies meet. The Christian Church takes upon this understanding and associates the Cosmic Tree with the Cross of Christ's Crucifixion. A famous quote in the Book of Genesis reads: 'Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. Upon tasting the forbidden fruit, Man discovers himself naked, vulnerable, destined to suffering and death. Man is chased away from the Heavens, from the Tree of Life, of immortality. The cosmic order is reestablished through Christ's coming into the world for the salvation of mankind from sin. The Cross of His sacrificial Crucifixion becomes the spatial and temporal center of the world, thus fully resembling the Tree of Life. Through this filter, the profiles of 98 families inside the large tree shape symbolically signify the meeting point between the mortal and tormented life of Romanian families under the Communist regime and the immortal and blissful life they were granted in Heavens through their sacrificial suffering.



Figure 33 : Family Portraits on the Background of Romanian Agricultural Land

Room 70 is labeled 'The Memory of the Manuscripts' and displays original texts considered 'hostile' by the Communist authorities. Those caught owning or reading such manuscripts were imprisoned as 'class enemies', 'suspicious elements', or 'plotters against the social order'. The manuscripts displayed in this room are considered masterpieces of Romanian literature: 'The Diary of Happiness' (by Nicolae Steinhardt), 'Testament from the Morgue' (by Remus Radina), 'Awaiting the Final Hour' (by Dinu Pillat), 'The Road of the Cross' (by Aurel State), 'Torture Made Understandable to All' (by Florin Constantin Pavlovici), and 'The History of the National Peasant Party' (by Ioan Marta). These displayed manuscripts iconically signify both the repression against intellectuals during the Communist regime and culture as a means of resistance against the Sovietization of Romania.

The following room – room 71 – exhibits the 'Pupils in detention'¹¹⁶, which refers to the thousands of pupils and students arrested or deported by the Communist authorities between 1948 and 1989. Testimonials in this room speak of their disappointment with the Soviet-style education imposed on them. Inspired by resistance movements in other countries, many formed anti-Communist organizations, disseminated manifestos, or joined the partisans in the mountains. For many, resistance took the form of tearing up official posters and portraits, making jokes about the Communists, or drawing caricatures, yet they received harsh prison sentences. Thousands of youngsters were reported to the Bărăgan steppes. A list of 1,876 underage political prisoners and a statement that the

¹¹⁶ (Auto)biographical works on the imprisonment of underage Romanian political prisoners under the Communist regime: Andreica (2000, 2003), Vidanie (2009), Roșca (2011), Maxim (2012), Mihai (2015a), Teodorescu (2015).

figure is far from being complete iconically add scale to the repression of pupils and students. A panel iconically adds further drama to the story on display by mentioning that 175 school children (including primary school pupils) were wounded or interrogated by the Communist forces, and 40 dies during the Romanian Revolution in 1989. This room iconically reveals that both the Communists' repressive measures and the resistance to the Sovietization of Romania were irrespective of age.

The upcoming room – room 72 – is themed 'Medicine in prison' and exhibits one of the most repressed societal categories during the Communist times: the physicians and medical students. Due to the humanist character of their profession and the professional oath they had taken, they were obliged to treat all patients – even those labeled as 'enemies of the people' – with equal compassion. Most of them were actively involved in historical democratic parties and in leading academic and intellectual institutions. This turned physicians into a target of the repressive Communist authorities. Tens of portraits of leading physicians and medical students arrested by the Communists – most of them for 'plotting against the social order' - are displayed around the room. Behind bars and with no medical tools and limited medicine, they continued to treat political prisoners as well as they could. Their compassionate behavior is symbolically contrasted by the attitudes of the Communist authorities. A panel quotes the commander of the Cernavodă labor camp: 'Bandits, it is your problem if you get ill! We do not spend money on enemies of our social order. You, as doctors, will have to set up your infirmary as you know better. I am warning you: do not ask me for medicine! We have none! And your Americans are also not sending any!' Instances of imprisoned doctors respecting the Hippocratic Oath even behind bars are iconically contrasted by statements about official penitentiary

doctors who administered lethal injections, refused medical treatments, purposefully omitted to write or faked death certificates, did not sterilize syringes, conducted experiments for ‘re-education’, or participated directly to the physical repression of political prisoners. A panel depicts a different medical-related repressive tool: political psychiatry ¹¹⁷. A quote by the Romanian Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu iconically signifies the reasoning behind this method: ‘Only a madman does not recognize the superiority of the Socialist order nowadays’. Adding to this is a quote from an official Communist decree which states: ‘Mentally ill citizens considered dangerous can be forcefully confined in psychiatric hospitals’, and that ‘are considered dangerous those mentally ill citizens who, through their behaviours, endanger [...] the normal working and living conditions in their family and the society’. The magnitude of psychiatric repression is iconically signified by a map of Romania which displays the main psychiatric institutions used for the ‘re-education’ of political prisoners. The purge of physicians and medical students in the Communist prisons and the use of medicine for repressing political prisoners is symbolically signified by a large map of the human body on display (Figure 34). Compared to the maps of the human body usually used in medical cabinets worldwide for treating patients, the one displayed in room 72 presents the diseases of detention – separated into ‘medical conditions inflicted through tortures’ and ‘others’ - and their location in the human body – most of them on the head and torso.

¹¹⁷ On the psychiatric repression of political opponents during Communist times: Vianu (2006).

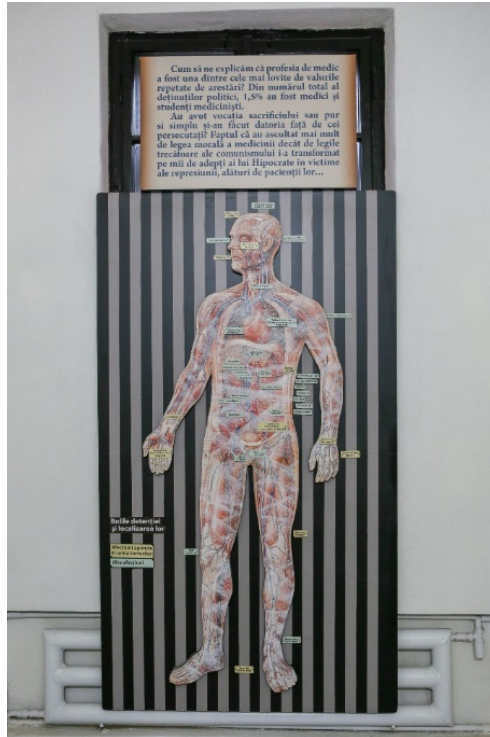


Figure 34 : Map of the Human Body Presenting the Diseases of Detention

The items displayed in this room contrast the use of medicine for compassionate purposes in pre-Communist Romania with its torturous and repressive usage in Communist times to symbolically signify the reversal and alteration of societal values.

Room 73 is an *in situ* exact reconstruction of the cell where Gheorghe I. Brătianu died in 1953. It follows the same pattern of display and meaningfulness as room 8 (the cell where Iuliu Maniu died). The only items found here are a metal bed frame without a mattress and a wooden bucket for necessities. The windows are blinded so that no light can pass through. As seen, Gheorghe I. Brătianu was one of the most important political and intellectual personalities of Romania, and a safe keeper of Romanian historical, cultural, and territorial integrity. An *in situ* reconstruction of the cell of his demise indexically materializes the murderous living conditions political prisoners were

subjected to, while symbolically signifying the violent shift from democratic, traditional, and intellectual Romania to the totalitarian, repressive, and ideological one.

Themed 'The Resistance in Maramureș', room 74 to the largest anti-Communist movement which existed in the North-Western part of Romania between 1948 and 1960. Groups of partisans of all social categories took up to the mountains and sustained an armed resistance against the Securitate forces. Portraits of hundreds of partisans displayed in this room iconically signify the scale and variety of the resistance. They depict many of the partisans in traditional Romanian peasant's clothes and close to their agricultural land, which symbolically signifies their resistance was in close relationship to the mythological perception among Romanians of a sacred land which ensures their freedom.

Eighteen portraits depict the eighteen pupils, students, and young peasants imprisoned in this precise cell the summer of 1948 for activating in an anti-Communist organization. They were the first lot of partisans to be imprisoned in the Sighet Penitentiary, and two of them died in prison. The displayed portraits iconically signify the beginning of both the anti-Communist resistance and the deadly repression against them. The harsh living conditions in the Sighet Prison are indexically signified by original rusty bed frames displayed in room 74 (Figure 35).



Figure 35 : Original Rusty Prison Bed Frames

Room 75 presents the ‘Demolitions in the 1980s’ carried out mostly in Bucharest which led to the large-scale destruction of historical and cultural heritage. A panel greeting the visitors mentions that the demolitions ordered by Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in the 1980s were among the most severe operations for destroying a country’s built heritage in history, comparable to the bombings in the World Wars. The panel further states that, unlike the destructions in the World Wars, the Communist regime of Romania inflicted an irrecoverable loss to their national history and culture by ordering the destruction of their own Romanian heritage. Many historical houses – due to which the interwar Bucharest was affectionately known by Romanians and foreigners alike as ‘Little Paris’ – were demolished and replaced with grey and depersonalized apartment buildings. As photographs displayed around room 75 iconically suggest, the Orthodox Church was

purposefully targeted with tens of centuries-old monasteries and churches demolished or relocated behind new Soviet-style buildings. A notorious demolition is that of the 18th-century Văcărești Monastery¹¹⁸ complex, known among Romanians as an architectural and spiritual national jewel. The central point of the room is a reconstruction of a demolished church wall which displays original stone religious motifs which used to decorate the Văcărești Monastery (Figure 36). These items indexically materialize the destruction brought by the Communist authorities onto their own nation's socio-cultural, architectural, and spiritual heritage and tradition.



Figure 36 : Original Stone Religious Motifs from the Demolished Văcărești Monastery

¹¹⁸ On the history and destruction of the Văcărești Monastery: Leahu (1996), Fodor & Mateescu (2009), Petcu (2010), Marinescu (2012).

In a country where Orthodoxy is intimately and actively connected to people's daily existence, a display of national Christian heritage purposefully destroyed in the name of ideology and dialectical-materialism is presumed to trigger strong emotional identitarian reactions within Romanian visitors.

Room 76 exhibits the 'Everyday life' in Communism in the context of the decrease in economic productivity and the population's equalization in poverty as a result of the nationalization of industry, the collectivization of agriculture, the introduction of the Soviet-style five-year plans, and the rationalization of basic products. The everyday poverty was masked by Stalinist propaganda culminating in large-scale festivals for praising the Communist Party and the USSR, colloquially referred to by Romanians as the 'festivals of hunger'. This is iconically and indexically signified through photographs depicting long queues for basic aliments and clothes rationalized based on a points system, original food coupons, original books for Marxist-Leninist ideology, propaganda posters, issues of the official newspaper praising the Party's self-labelled 'great achievements' in Soviet-style narration and graphics, and photographs of large festivals on stadiums with hundreds of people carrying portraits of Communist leaders, hammers and sickles, and red banners praising the Communist Party.

After a brief economic recovery and political liberalization in the aftermath of the declared independence from Moscow, the Communist regime took the country into a new era of economic and socio-cultural regress caused by hyper-industrialization and centralization, cultural isolation, and a North Korean-style personality cult of the country leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

One panel depicts the pro-natality decree adopted by the Communists as a means of forcefully increasing the population of the country¹¹⁹. Families were coerced to have more babies, abortions were punished with years in prison, and hefty fines were set for married couples who wanted to divorce. A well-known fact among Romanians is that, because of this measure and driven by the harsh living conditions in Romania, many women turned to illegal, alternative and risky abortion options. The dramas caused by this decree are indexically signified by a displayed table showing how maternal mortality because of post-abortion complications increased from 64 (0.23 / 1,000 women) in 1966 to 545 (1.49 / 1,000 women) in 1989. This gains further meaning considering the sacred nature of birth and cycle of life in Romanian tradition, as already mentioned.

Another panel presents the Socialist ideological education of the youth. At different stages of the gymnasium, pupils would become ‘falcons of the nation’ or ‘pioneers of the nation’, each of them with a different compulsory uniform. The pioneers’ pledge of allegiance is quoted: ‘I will work and study to become a reliable son of my motherland – the Socialist Republic of Romania; I will be loyal to the people and the Communist Party of Romania; I will unshakably respect the pioneer’s duties’. This displayed compulsory pledge of allegiance iconically signifies the ideological indoctrination of the Romanian youth by the Communist regime. Photographs of pupils wearing the same compulsory uniform under the portrait of the Communist dictator of Romania – present in all classrooms of all educational institutions – iconically signifies

¹¹⁹ Additional information on the demographic policies of the Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime: Kligman (1998), Doboș, Jinga, & Soare (2010), Jinga, Soare, Doboș, & Roman (2011).

the standardization and depersonalization of the new generation of Romanians purposefully imposed by the Communist authorities. This is indexically supported by original ‘falcon’ and ‘pioneer’ uniforms on display (Figure 37).



Figure 37 : Original Uniforms of ‘Falcon’ and ‘Pioneer’ of the Nation

On a panel next to it photographs of large-scale meetings and events where hundreds of thousands of people are praising the Communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu are displayed. Popular slogans such as ‘When we say CEAUȘESCU, we say HEROISM! When we say ROMANIA, we say COMMUNISM!, or ‘Our respect and our pride, Ceaușescu Romania!’, and poems such as ‘To the beloved leader’, ‘He, the forehead of Romania risen high through the century’, or ‘[Communist] Party – Strong daring’ are also on display. These items iconically display the North Korean-style personality cult

embraced by Ceaușescu after his meeting with Kim Il-sung in 1978. The festive image projected by such events of homage to Nicolae Ceaușescu is iconically contrasted by photos and documents on the adjoining panel, which depict the difficult life of Romanians during the rationalization¹²⁰ of the 1980s: empty stores, temperatures of not more than 1-degrees Celsius inside houses, a maximum of 2-3 hours of hot water per day, a limit of electricity of approximately 2 kilowatt/family/day, or a monthly allowance of 20 liters of petrol per month for personal cars. The nature of the regime is iconically signified by duplicitous newspaper titles such as: 'Save electricity! – so that we advance firmly on the illuminated path'. The 'rationalized alimentation' introduced in 1981 allocated a monthly allowance of 1 kg of sugar, 11 liters of oil, 1 pack of butter, 5 eggs, and 1 kg of meat to each citizen. Many of these products were replaced with alternatives: for example, the soy salami replaced meat salami, while milk was replaced with a mix of water with proteins obtained from animal leftovers. In the official newspaper, the Communist authorities announced that such measures were meant to make the population healthier.

Any purchase meant kilometers-long queues which sometimes meant queueing for 2-4 days. Even so, people had no insurance that there were enough products for everyone. An entire wall in room 76 depicts one such long queue. On top of this photo, there are words such as 'milk', 'meats', or 'vegetables', while underneath this photo original items such as shopping bags, empty bottles of milk, refillable bottles of soda water, and refillable gas canisters are displayed. This section of the exhibition iconically

¹²⁰ On the rationalization of basic living products and the culture of queueing under the Communist regime: Opriș (2009), Georgescu (2013), Historia (2013), Mihai (2015b).

signifies that queueing had become a style of life for Romanians under the Communist regime (Figure 38).



Figure 38 : Regular Items and the Culture of Queuing Under the Communist Regime

Other items on display are a glass cabinet, a fish-shaped decorative trinket, and Soviet-made black-and-white TV, radio, and tape recorder. These original items indexically recreate the typical living room for most Romanians living under the Communist regime. In their banality and imposed popularity, they iconically signify the depersonalized Sovietized Romanian.

The hundreds of items, places, customs, and mentalities displayed in room 76 were unavoidably part of the everyday life for the majority of Romanians during Communist times but also stretching into the post-Communist decades. It is expected that many Romanians have personally lived through these times and owned – most likely many still

own – similar or identical items to those on display. Thus, it is presumed that the exhibits in room 76 trigger strong identitarian emotional reactions of self-identification with the displayed narrative.

Room 77 is themed 'Opponents and dissidents in the 8th and 9th decade' and presents – according to official museum interpretation – 'exceptions from a country that was reduced to silence and submission'. Individual panels exhibit documents, photographs, and testimonials for some of the most well-known Romanian anti-Communist dissidents, such as Vasile Paraschiv, Paul Goma, Doina Cornea, Gheorghe Ursu, or Radu Filipescu. In different ways, such as disseminating anti-Communist manifestos or creating free workers' syndicates, they defied the Communist authorities' claim for total societal control. All of those mentioned managed to send messages about the real state of events in Romania to radio stations in democratic Western societies, especially to the 'Free Europe' radio station. One displayed photo of a doll Doina Cornea used to secretly send messages from Romania iconically signifies the fear which characterized the society during Communist times and the ingenious and risky measures one had to take for speaking out about the totalitarian regime in Romania. Statements of dissidents locked up in psychiatric hospitals, brutally beaten up (some, such as Gheorghe Ursu, beaten to death), or continuously interrogated and surveilled by the Securitate iconically confirm the repressive and brutal nature of the regime against any internal opposition. Such statements symbolically gain meaning through the Christian teaching of mankind fighting and sacrificing for Truth and Freedom, as discussed earlier in the paper. The anti-Communist resistance and the Communist repression against opponents are

indexically materialized in this room through displayed original items and writings of dissidents.

The following room – room 78 – exhibits 'The Golden Age, or Communist kitsch', and reproduces the depth and spread of Ceaușescu's cult of personality. Photos of hundreds of items depicting the dictator and his wife iconically signify this cult. As the displayed photos show, portraits¹²¹ of them were omnipresent in all rooms of all public institutions and in most houses, and large-scale festivals and gatherings aimed at praising Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife were held periodically. These are indexically materialized by original portraits, statues, and busts displayed around the room (Figure 39). Photocopies of Nicolae Ceaușescu's PhD degree in Political Sciences mention the following contribution, in the typical wooden language of the regime: 'For his contribution of exceptional theoretical and practical value – an expression of the creative scientific Socialism, to the development and enrichment of political sciences, to the elaboration of the scientific outlook on the edification of the multilaterally developed Socialist society and the advancement of Romania towards Communism, to the elucidation of the major issues in the contemporary world, and to the fight for the cause of social progress, peace and cooperation among nations'. Also, his wife was promoted in Party media as a 'savant of mondial fame'. It is a well-known fact and a subject of folk humor that Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife had only finished primary school before being awarded, as displayed documents show, titles of *doctor honoris causa*. Their academic

¹²¹ On the omnipresent portrayal of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife: Cioroianu (2006).

merits for claimed Socialist achievements are iconically contrasted by photographs of the hard living conditions of the Romanian population under their rule. The academic robes worn by Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife for receiving the *doctor honoris causa* title are exhibited in room 78 and, through the filter of the purged intellectuality already discussed, indexically signify the servility and adherence of the new wave of intellectuals and academic institutions to the Communist cult of personality.



Figure 39 : Period Portraits of Nicolae Ceaușescu

Room 79 presents the workers' movements in the Jiu Valley (1977) and Brașov (1987) against the command economy and the cult of personality imposed by privileged Communist officials. Photographs of the miners' strike in August 1977 iconically signify the first large-scale manifestation of collective protest against the Communist economic policies. Nothing was mentioned in the local media about this strike, and Romanians could only find out about it from the 'Free Europe' radio station. Adjoining documents show prison sentences of 2-5 years for participants in the strike, and iconically signify the sustained repression against any form of opposition.

Another panel depicts the workers' movement in November 1987 when thousands of people took to the streets of Braşov shouting 'We want food for our children!', or 'We want heating!' Soon after, as displayed documents iconically signify, the first public demands for 'Down with Ceauşescu!' and 'Down with Communism!' in decades were heard. Hundreds were arrested and sentenced to years in prison.

The items displayed in room 79 symbolically signify that the despair among Romanian people caused by decades of Communist repression had reached unbearable levels, as these two movements eventually led to the collapse of the Communist regime in December 1989. In the peak of societal fear and ideological indoctrination, demands such as 'Down with Ceauşescu!' and 'Down with Communism!' gain meaning when seen through the filter of the Christian teaching of salvation by fighting for Truth and Freedom.

The following room – room 80 – is themed 'Freedom over the radio waves' and exhibits the four Western radio stations the Romanians obtained information from during the Communist regime: Free Europe, the BBC, the Voice of America, and the Voice of Germany. In times of premeditated isolation of the population from external and internal information combined with increasing stereotypical propaganda, the four aforementioned radio stations – where important intellectuals and anti-Communist dissidents who had fled into exile were heard - enjoyed complete trust among Romanians. Strictly forbidden, these stations were listened to in secrecy, and the news was disseminated by word of mouth. As documents on display mention, those found listening to Western radio stations or talking about such news risked ten years in prison for 'public agitation'.

Photos and documents on a panel depict attacks on Radio Free Europe journalists organized by the Securitate in different European cities in the 1980s. One of them was beaten up savagely in front of her house in Paris and was hospitalized in a coma. Others received anonymous packages containing bombs wrapped up as books, while others suffered suspect deaths. On 21st February 1981 a bomb – placed by world-famous terrorist Carlos the Jackal at the order of the Securitate - exploded in the Romanian section of the Radio Free Europe in Munich. These items iconically signify the efforts the Communist Party put into silencing their opponents.

Beyond signifying the scale of the repression, the narrative on display in room 80 iconically signifies the high risks many Romanians – dissidents and regular population – took in order to spread and obtain information about the real situation in Romania. This symbolically gains meaning through the Christian teaching on saving one's soul by fighting for Truth and Freedom.

Rooms 81, 82, and 83 revisit the 1953 Uprising in Berlin, the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, and the Prague Spring (1968) against Communist regimes. The panels exhibit a similar historical pattern of increased indoctrination, decreased living standards, brutal repression against anti-Communist opponents, sacrificial gestures. These events ultimately led to the fall of Communist regimes across Europe in 1989. Photos and documents in these rooms iconically internationalize both the repressive and totalitarian nature of Communist movements and the people's struggle to regain their personal and national freedom.

The last section inside the museum is comprised of connected rooms 84-87 and is themed 'Iuliu Maniu, a father of democracy'. A series of panels present his familial, educational, political, and professional background, culminating in obtaining the leadership of the National Peasant Party, his fundamental role in the events which lead to the Great Union of Romania in 1918 and in the flourishing socio-economic interwar times, and his open and sustained opposition against any form of authoritarian regime. The fact that he could oppose a royal dictatorship and a National-Socialist one before being imprisoned based on a staged trial and exterminated by the Communists iconically signifies the brutal and complete nature of the latter regime. Displayed photos of Iuliu Maniu representing Romania at its highest economic, social, educational and developmental levels are iconically contrasted by images from his staged trial and a death certification which mentions he had 'no occupation' and that he passed away because of 'heart failure'. The antithesis between exhibited original personal items which had belonged to Iuliu Maniu and an original door from the cells he was imprisoned in at the Galați Prison symbolically signify the forced transition between the free and democratic pre-Communist Romania and the closed and totalitarian Communist one.

In the center of the room a round panel reads a quote by Iuliu Maniu upon finding out the Communists were building concentration camps in the Northern region of Maramureș: 'Concentration camps and prisons can lock up and kill people, but they cannot lock up and kill ideas, which circulate no matter how many obstacles they run into. Terror frightens Man but cannot strangle Idea, which pulls through whenever it is supported by Law, Freedom, and Morals. What is the worth of 50-60,000 sacrificed people, if their sacrificed lives birth a large, free, and unchained Romania. I am not

frightened by concentration camps, by death, and I wholeheartedly believe in the good future of Romania.’ This displayed quote iconically mirrors the Christian teaching of sacrificing oneself for Freedom and Truth.

Except for the 87 rooms indoors, there are several outdoor sections of the museum. One of two courtyards of the museum exhibits 18 bronze statues by sculptor Aurel Vlad (Figure 40). Seventeen of them are grouped in a scene which indexically suggests they are walking towards an old-looking, empty brick wall while supervised from a prison watchtower. According to official museum interpretation, the wall symbolically signifies the lack of perspectives and opportunities under totalitarianism. In its look and context, the brick wall also iconically signifies a typical wall used for the execution of political prisoners. The 17 statues are depicted as skinny (their ribs are clearly visible) and naked individuals, which iconically signifies the hunger, cold, and complete lack of intimacy they faced in prison. Their bodies are contorted, and some are missing limbs which iconically signifies the physical torment political prisoners were subjected to by the Communist authorities. Each of these 17 statues is portrayed differently: looking up and pointing their arms to the sky in pray, looking down in disillusion, shrugging in hopelessness, aggressively twisting their arms in anguish and anger, pulling their hair in despair, or covering their eyes in fear. In so doing, this statuary system iconically signifies the complexity and diversity of emotions experienced by the political prisoners in regards to their own and Romania’s fate in Communist times.



Figure 40 : Statue Complex in Museum Courtyard

Standing aside from the group is an 18th statue which depicts an imperious headless figure whose imposing right-hand stretches out towards the other 17 statues. Within the narrative on display and the symbolism already discussed, the meaning of this statue is twofold. On the one hand, it iconically signifies the authoritarian nature of the Communist regime sending the political prisoners to perish. On the other hand, it symbolically signifies a pleading call for visitors to bear witness to the suffering of the political prisoners, to openly face painful moments of history, and commemorate and seek justice for victims of totalitarianism.

In the second courtyard, museum developers placed an ‘Area for Prayer and Recollection’ (Figure 41). It is designed as an underground chapel with an overhanging impluvium. The walls flanking the declining ramp leading to the entrance of the chapel are engraved with the names of approximately 8,000 Romanians who died in the Communist prisons, labor camps, or during deportations. These names indexically signify the magnitude of the repression. According to official museum interpretation, the chapel is meant to iconically signify that resistance in the Communist prisons was only possible through faith. This statement is supported by the design of the chapel.



Figure 41 : ‘Area for Prayer and Recollection’

Built underground in darkness and humidity – unlike the usual churches built aboveground – this chapel iconically resembles a crypt used for burials or the prison cells in Communist penitentiaries. Daylight passes through the cross-shaped cut in the center

of the cupola and is filtered onto the veil of water from a basin where candles are lit, casting the reflection of numerous crosses of light against the walls. This iconically signifies a common fact in prison memoirs: the only rays of hope in the dark days of imprisonment were those of the divine light, whose symbolism has already been discussed. A water basin where people pay respect to their deceased by lighting up candles can be found in all Orthodox Churches. Its presence in the underground chapel of the Sighet Memorial iconically invites visitors to reflect upon the suffering they had just witnessed in the museum, pay respects to the victims, and pray for the souls of the deceased. Twelve apple trees planted on top of the chapel iconically mirror the Christian concept of the Tree of Life already discussed in this paper. Their presence symbolically transforms the chapel into a meeting point between life and death, between Underworld and Heavens, and a place of salvation through remembrance and continuation of the victims' fight for Truth and Freedom.

The last section of the Sighet Memorial Museum lies 2.5 kilometers outside of the town of Sighet and is labeled 'The Paupers' Cemetery'. It is a complex semiotic structure built on the place where those who died in the Sighet Penitentiary are presumed to have been buried. Since the deceased were buried secretly at night in unmarked mass graves and their death certificates were either forged or destroyed, historians and archaeologists have not been able to discover their precise remains. The museum developers decided to build a symbolic landscape project on the approximate place of their burial, according to testimonials. On this place, the cartographic outline of Romania is recreated in fir trees

(Figure 42). The fir tree¹²² has been used in wedding and burial rituals all over Romania for centuries, thus being symbolically connected to one's cycle of life and iconically mirroring the Christian Tree of Life. In Romanian mythological tradition, the use of fir trees in funerals creates a positive atmosphere of confidence in front of death and ensures an element of reparation in the unbalance produced by death.



Figure 42 : 'The Paupers' Cemetery'

Within the map, a cenotaph – dominated by a massive Byzantine-style cross – was built on the spot corresponding to the geographical position of Sighet. Inside the cenotaph, there are urns which bear the Romanian folk motif of the 'soul-bird'¹²³. This motif has been used centuries in funeral rituals across Romania and is still very popular especially

¹²² On the symbolism of the fir tree in archaic Romanian funerals: Ghinoiu (2004), Bernea (2007).

¹²³ On the Christian symbolism of the 'soul-bird': Rank (1998), Pavelescu (2009), Târziu (2011).

in rural areas. In archaic Romanian thinking, the bird symbolically signifies the soul of the deceased. It takes the soul-bird 40 days to reach the Heavens if appeased and supported by the living through righteous commemoration. If tradition is not respected, the soul may accidentally enter a different animal and roam the earth restlessly without the ability to rise to the Heavens. These urns contain soil brought by people from places of execution, mass graves, and tombs of victims across Romania. These items iconically invite visitors to contribute to the salvation of the souls of those who perished during the Communist repression by engaging in proper remembrance and commemoration.

A monumental cross capped by a belfry and a viewing platform are found at the entrance of the Paupers' Cemetery. Bells¹²⁴ have been an integral part of the Christian cult since ancient times, and are present in all Christian churches where they are tolled according to tradition. According to this tradition, the sound of bells being tolled iconically resettles humans from their orderly life into a superior metaphysical one, while cleansing the place of evil spirits. The sound calls believers to share spiritual joys and sorrows in piety. The tolling of the bell placed at the Paupers' Cemetery symbolically expresses the pain and sadness with the fate of political prisoners, purifies the place, and calls visitors to solidarity in solemn commemoration. The access to the bell and viewing platform is done on a ladder which symbolically signifies the biblical Ladder of Life¹²⁵. This widely spread motif in Christianity refers to the soul's climb after death to the

¹²⁴ On the Christian and mythological symbolism and functions of the bell: Dănălache (2009), Stănilă (2015).

¹²⁵ On the Christian concept of the 'Ladder of Life': Mack (2000), Nelson & Collins (2006), Botoșăneanu (2015).

Heavens, to the Godly light. It also stands for the steps of virtuous life one must climb during one's life to ensure an easy passing into the Afterlife. Its presence in the Paupers' Cemetery symbolically signifies that salvation of souls for both the deceased and the living can be achieved through the awareness, remembrance, and commemoration of the victims of the Communist regime nationwide.